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The Pandav Princes

By Wallace Gandy

Author of 'A Persian Hero,' 'In the Days of Lionheart,'
'Wanderings of Rama, Prince of India

506

With Introduction, Notes, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

Delhi—Historical Elements of this Story—Tribal Warfare—National Struggles—Brahmans—The Holy Song—Some Characters—Krishna—Connection between THE PANDAV PRINCES *and* THE WANDERINGS OF RAMA.

THE story of *The Pandav Princes* is full of dramatic situations and exciting moments. The people among whom the action is distributed are full of human nature, and almost every phase of character is shown. The scene of action, generally speaking, is that portion of India which lies along the banks of the Ganges and its great tributary the Jumna.

Delhi, once again the capital of the Indian Empire, was not founded at the time of the incidents which open the story —and as everyone knows, Delhi is an ancient city. It was founded by the Pandav Princes after the Kuru kingdom was divided between them and their cousins. Before the city of Indraprastha, as it was called, could be built, a jungle had to be cleared. To this day there exists near Delhi a ruined place which is pointed out as Indraprastha.

The Pandav Princes were the five sons of Pandu, whose brother was king of the Kuru country. After Pandu's death —which occurs before the story really begins—the boys were brought up by their uncle with his own sons, and the two groups of boys were rivals in every sport until, as men, the hundred sons of Dhrita-rashtra were envious of the usually victorious five.

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Strictly, they were all Kurus, but the word became more particularly attached to the sons of Dhrita-rashtra, while the five are known as the Pandavs.

The story, as presented here, is a version of a great Indian epic, the *Maha-bharata*, the origin of which is lost in antiquity. The sage, Vyasa, 'The Compiler,' is considered to be the author, and in any case, while many of the details are the product of the lively Oriental imagination and suited to the Eastern love of the marvellous, the main incidents are founded in historical fact.

Without going into too much detail, it is possible to show clearly the place of the main incidents in the line of history. To do so we must trace the line back into periods about fifteen hundred years before the Christian era. It is not of much use to reckon years one by one, or even in tens, in considering a period so far removed from modern times, when the dates of events can be so easily fixed. Accordingly we shall reckon in nothing less than centuries.

In 1500 B.C., that is, thirty-four centuries ago, we have reason to believe many little struggles took place along the banks of the Ganges. As a result, not a few tribes perished from remembrance, while several were consolidated into small nations. The most important nations formed at this time were the Matsyas, Bharats and Panchalas, who will be mentioned in the following story; and the Kosalas and Videhas, who appear in the story of *Rama: Prince of India*.

We pass to 1400 B.C. Between this and 1300 B.C. the nations began to establish dynasties; that is to say, the succession had become regular. Thus the first dynastic king of the Bharats was Kuru, and the name of the royal family passed over to the people. The Kurus established themselves strongly, and other allied tribes were driven out of their confines, east and west. The struggles which occurred between these nations and the Kurus are described in the *Maha-bharata*, though they do not come in the version given in this book, which deals with the Pandavs.

This state of affairs continued through another century,

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which brings us close to 1200 B.C. At this time the Pandus, a younger race than the Kurus, arrive at a state of power among the Panchalas. As will be seen in this version, an alliance by marriage is made.

The Pandus rebelled against the established monarch, the reasons why will be seen in the story. Open war was declared. The Pandus had many powerful allies, and the whole of the Northern Indian peoples, shortly before 1200 B.C., were plunged in a dreadful conflict, known as the battle of Kurukshetra. The Pandus came out victorious and ascended the throne of Hastinapura, which had been the regal home of the Kurus. Soon after 1200 B.C. the young prince, Prakshit, a descendant of both Pandus and Panchalas, came to the throne. Here our story ends.

We must understand that rigid organisation of Indian life into castes belongs to a later date ; yet throughout the epic, the four castes are continually mentioned, and particular reference is made on many occasions to the privileges and rights of the priestly caste. The Brahmans gradually assumed the ruling power, becoming superior to the monarchs themselves.

In fact, although omitted from or condensed in this version, there is much religious teaching in the epic. It is in the nature of things that gradually the religious element was made predominant as ages passed, largely because it was left to the devotees of religion to pass the *Maha-bharata* down. To obtain a rough idea of how great the religious element is in the original, it will be useful to think of ' the Holy Song,' which, in our version, is given in the thirteenth chapter. The fight is about to begin, and the hero, Arjun, halts his chariot between the armies and discourses with his godly companion, Krishna, on whether he should or should not fight. Krishna gives a complete system of rules of conduct, many of which compare with the precepts of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, whilst some of them, if it may be said in this sacred connection, would read like the mottoes which many business houses are now adopting as being up-to-date.

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'The Holy Song,' then, is a series of dialogues, spoken at a critical moment, but if they were printed in full in this book, taking the version which Warren Hastings approved, the space of no less than eighty-one pages would have to be set apart for this theme alone.

In many cases the religious portions of the epic were extended unduly by the priestly reciters. Another way in which the story is lengthened—for the *Maha-bharata* and the *Rama-yana* are without doubt the longest stories in the world—is by the repetition of scenes. Truly there is a fascination about these repetitions : a kind of curiosity arises as to whether the persons in whose lips the repetitions are placed will relate an incident exactly as it was related before. Then again, in the hands of a skilful author, repetition is made to show the character of the person speaking. Often the sympathies, interests and even desires of a person may be discerned from the small alterations—additions or omissions—he makes in a story.

A striking example of this will be found in Chapter XII., where several counsellors put the case for peace before the jealous prince, Duryodhan : every speech, even in our short version, will be seen to be marked strongly by the character of the speaker. There are no two men—or women—alike in the whole story. Each character stands out distinct from its neighbours.

The Pandav Princes is an epic of war. *The Wanderings of Rama*, its companion volume, is a story of faithfulness and obedience to duty. Arjun, of the Pandavs, is a knight of prowess among knights of prowess. Draupadi, the princess of Panchala, is a spirited woman. Her defiant speech when insulted by Duryodhan is a fine specimen of forceful language. Yudhishthir, a hero, is the most righteous of the Pandav brothers.

The celestial element is contained in Krishna, who acts from time to time as a wise counsellor, a clever casuist, a master of strategy and an instrument of Divine wrath. Who Krishna is will be explained in the last part of the fifth chapter, where the vision of the seer, Narada, is described.

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Here, however, is another connection between the two epics. Krishna of *The Pandav Princes* is the same as Rama of *The Prince of India*, in spite of perhaps two centuries lapsing between the two appearances. How this comes to pass is as follows. The Hindoo believes that the Holy One, Vishnu or Nara-yana, returns to earth whenever he has some great work to accomplish. These comings or advents are known as avatars. Vishnu appeared for the seventh time as Rama, in the *Rama-yana*. His eighth avatar was as Krishna, monarch of the sea-girt Dwarka. The ninth advent was caused by his desire to free the world from the abuses due to Brahmanism, and the story is told in *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold. In the ninth avatar, taking place in 560 B.C.—after a lapse of about seven hundred years—he appeared as Buddha and remoulded the religion. The tenth avatar has not yet occurred. It is prophesied that Vishnu will then appear seated on a white horse, with a gleaming sword in his hand. The object of the tenth, and last, incarnation will be to restore to earth the purity of its early days. He will make the mind of mankind as clear as crystal.

It will easily be seen that a story in such great detail as the original must be of great value in the study of history and geography. But there is another side of folk stories and epics that is being recognized as of great importance—that is, the sidelights they throw upon the life of the people, or their social history, as it is called. The value of the *Maha-bharata* in this respect will be brought out in the concluding pages.

For the rest, the story will speak for itself, which is quite the best way of presenting a version of an epic to one's readers.

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I

THE RIVALS

Boyish Pranks—A Dark Design—The Stadium—Disturbing Signs.

AGES ago, along the upper course of the sacred Ganges, flourished the kingdom of Kuru. Its sovereign had two sons, of whom the elder, Dhritarashtra, was born blind; the other was named Pandu. In time Dhritarashtra became the monarch of Kuru and Pandu died, but his name was always remembered in connection with his five sons, although he did not live long to glory in their deeds.

After Pandu's death the five brothers, known as the Pandavs, were brought up with their cousins, who numbered a full hundred. The eldest of Pandu's sons was Yudhishthir, a young man of truth and piety; Bhima, the second, was a stalwart fighter; but their brother Árjun, the third, distinguished himself in arms above all other princes, and the two youngest were twins.

The eldest son of the Kuru king was Duryodhan, a man of jealousy.

As boys the Pandavs were possessed of a mischievous spirit no less than were their more

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numerous cousins. Particularly in Bhima did this wilful, though not cruel, trait find expression. Games which began simply enough often became the occasions of rather violent contests, and Duryodhan, who envied Bhima, was not his match in wrestling, which sport was not always carried out under the best of rules. At times Bhima, having worn out his adversaries, seized them by the hair and dragged them over the meadows. When the Kurus climbed fruit trees, he amused himself by shaking the trees so violently that the disappointed boys were obliged to descend.

The story passes to speak of an event of their early manhood. Duryodhan affected to have forgotten all these humiliating pranks of the past, and, having selected a field at the brink of the Ganges, he caused a pavilion to be raised, and ample preparations were made for a royal holiday. All the youths were present, and Duryodhan seemed very attentive to Bhima's wishes. He plied him with wine and unstinted shares of all the delicate viands a healthy boy could enjoy, to say nothing of the irresistible temptations of Oriental confectionery.

In time the feasting, bathing and sporting were over. Bhima failed to distinguish himself that day, and as the boys returned to the palace his four brothers noticed that he was not of the party. After making due enquiry they were much puzzled, but not without a shrewd suspicion of what had occurred. They remembered the bad feeling of

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Duryodhan towards Bhima, and felt there had been foul play. In this they were right, for Bhima had been drugged by Duryodhan and had fallen asleep by the margin of the Ganges. It was the work of a moment for the black-hearted Kuru to bind the Pandav in his stupor and roll the log-like body into the swirling waves. Bhima sank into the lower depths of the mystic river, penetrating to regions which man as a rule was not destined to reach.

He descended to the lowest of the under-worlds, a region peopled with alluring forms, which moved about to the sound of entrancing music, and were surrounded by all the delights the human soul could wish for. Numbered among the inhabitants of Patala were the giants and demons, who from time to time had troubled the earth and almost succeeded in frustrating the plans of the gods. The snake-gods, called Nagas, lived here, ruled by Sesha, and presently they attacked the drifting body of Bhima, biting him with their poisonous fangs.

The blood of a healthy man would have been rendered foul by the poison-laden slime of the Nagas; Bhima's case, however, was different. His blood was saturated with impure poisons administered at the feast by the false Duryodhan. Still unconscious, Bhima knew nothing of the fierce attacks of the snakes. Gradually, however, he showed signs of recovery. His limbs moved, his breathing became regular, and finally he awoke to notice that a coiling, crawling, filthy mass of serpents was receding from his presence.

So remarkable an occurrence as the recovery of a

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mortal, immune from the Naga poison, was reported to Sesha, the king of the snake-gods. He commanded the unique mortal to be brought before him, upon which he was pleased with Bhima and instructed his chiefs to make the young man a welcome guest.

Sesha further favoured Bhima by ordering his attendants to give the youth a magic potion to restore him to strength. Many jars were set before Bhima, who drank eight, and by this time his strength was increased beyond what he had formerly enjoyed. It was now comparable to that of the elephant.

It was indeed fortunate for Bhima that the Nagas had bitten him. Their poison counteracted the drugs administered by Duryodhan, and, thanks to Sesha's interest, he was soon returned to the upper world all the better for the accident. The four brothers and their mother, Pritha, apprehensive for his fate, were overjoyed at his return. Yet the whole family decided to say nothing of the incident.

Meanwhile the evil spirit of jealousy continued to eat at the heart of the blind king's eldest son, Duryodhan, and he grew to hate his five cousins because he could not cope with them. They were indeed heaven-born heroes, for a god had inspired the birth of each. The eldest, Yudhishthir, was the son of Dharma or Virtue; the heavenly sire of Bhima was Vayu, the god of Wind; Arjun's birth was inspired by the Rain god, Indra; the twins also were of celestial origin.

All the princes, the five and the hundred, had been tutored in everything necessary to their high estate by Drona, a Brahman warrior-priest, and one day the preceptor suggested that the Kuru king should hold

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a tournament, at which the skill and valour of the princes, his pupils, might be worthily put to the test.

'Let them rein the steed and throw the dart,' said he, and the ancient monarch was pleased.

'Best of Brahmans and warriors,' he answered, 'nobly have you done your part in the training of my sons and nephews; yourself decide when this royal tournament shall be held. Forthwith let the king's consent and the laws of combat be published far and wide. It is true my orbs of vision are sightless; the noonday sun is hidden from me; other men, happier than I, will see these noble youths contending, and in fancy only shall I behold them; but my old breast, where sadness dwells, will be cheered with a father's pride and joy.'

So Drona, without delay, measured out the ground for the tourney, a spot clear of jungle, a grassy meadow in whose midst stood a crystal fountain; and here he raised an altar and upon it placed holy gifts for the gods, that they might bless the arena of his choosing. As though the gods were favourable from the outset, the day was calm and bright, and people from far and near attended the sacrifice.

Then beautiful mansions speedily arose around the meadow; buildings were erected by architects of skill and fame, and emblazoned with the arms of the king and members of the royal household. The pavilion was surrounded by stages from which the crowds could view the scene, and the place was graced with the white tents of the nobles of Kuru and those who came to take part in the sports.

Very gay and festive the whole scene looked

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when the chosen morning dawned brightly upon the plain. The blind king and his attendants with joyful steps left his halls and entered the mansions prepared for their reception, beautiful buildings encrusted with gold, and glittering with lapis lazuli and strings of pearls.

Led by the fair queen of Kuru, Gandhari, and her widowed sister-queen, Pritha, the royal ladies mounted the steps to take their positions on the terrace of the improvised palace. The beauty of the scene and the grace of the maidens recalled to the thinkers and poets the lofty Mount Meru, along whose slopes move the consorts of the gods.

The people of all classes gathered—Brahmans, kings and rulers, tillers of the soil, and men from the booth, the loom and anvil—and as the trumpet call announced the beginning of the tournament, a surging, ocean-like acclamation arose.

The aged preceptor, Drona, attended by his warrior son, Aswatthaman, came forward. He wore a white robe, his sacrificial thread was white, as were also his garlands and sandals; and years had crowned him with the rime of age. Father and son resembled the Moon and Mars in conjunction traversing a cloudless sky.

After due offerings had been paid to the gods and sacred verses chanted by the priests, the gayer note of the sankha, or conch-shell trumpet, gave the signal for the warriors to enter the lists.

They came, Yudhishthir leading, as became the eldest. The populace was delighted at the martial

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grandeur. At times the wonderful skill of the princely soldiers held the spectators breathless. Again, joyful shouts arose as deeds of greater skill were seen. Fear, too, was not unknown to the assembly, for with a sudden turn a warrior would shoot an arrow just above their heads, and with a common impulse the crowd would bend to escape.

The exercises included shooting while riding furiously across the stadium, mimic warfare on horseback or elephant, and the use of the sword, mace, buckler and rapier.

Presently Bhima and Duryodhan singled out each other. Pritha, proud of the young men, spoke joyful words to Gandhari, while the sightless monarch listened to the vivid descriptions of Vidura.

The rival princes carried maces, and, after standing for some moments firm and massive like turreted rocks, they displayed their prowess with their weapons as they guided their fiery steeds up and down the course. Now they closed in to the fight, and many a mighty blow was struck. The watching throng was keenly divided, and the mass swayed in all the anger and excitement of real combat.

'Hail to the Kuru Prince Duryodhan!'

'Hail to the mighty hero Bhima!'

But, strange to say, Drona took no joy in this skill of his pupils. With the eye of a seer, the preceptor noted the surging crowd, and detected, below the shouts of joy or rage, the beginning of serious partisanship, the upshot of which he dared not contemplate.

To his son he whispered, 'Quickly divide the

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contestants. Speak fair as to their claims. Part them and announce the combat ended.'

Reluctant but obedient, the princes held the poised maces and slowly retired leaving the field calm and peaceful as the ocean when a tempest has subsided.

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II

THE TOURNAMENT

Arjun's Display—The Coming of Karna—Rival Warriors—Anointment of Karna.

AFTER a short pause the trumpets shrilled and the drums beat, as the white-robed priest stepped into the meadow. The music ceased, and with majestic tones Drona's voice rose in command.

'Bid the gallant Arjun here—Arjun, prince and warrior, begotten of Indra and endowed with Vishnu's power!'

The prince came forth, gauntleted and girdled, bearing a huge bow. First he performed obeisance to the gods, then, shining in his golden armour like a cloud in the beams of the setting sun, he strode forward amid the delighted cries of the assembled multitude.

'Behold the warlike son of Pandu. Hail to the son of Pritha, in whom lies Indra's power!'

The gentle Pritha heard these expressions with a feeling deeper than gratification; her bosom heaved and tears of joy moistened her lashes.

Vidura told Dhritarashtra that the acclamations were the people's greeting to Arjun, his nephew, and the blind king blessed Pritha, and her sons whose manliness enriched his state.

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But Arjun had begun the display of arms. Now erect, now bending from his car, now on the turf, he shot arrows with unerring skill. Every target, near or far, was pierced by an arrow inscribed with Arjun's name. A wild boar, protected with iron plates, rushed across the arena; instantly Arjun shot the beast in the jaws and poured four more arrows in the same vulnerable spot. A hollow cow-horn, swinging in the wind, he pierced with twenty-one arrows. His rapier play and mace wielding were marvellous, even in the eyes of men accustomed to remarkable feats of arms.

The festive day was almost ended, music had ceased and the crowds were dissolving, when suddenly a noise of armour and weapons of war arose. For a moment it seemed that the mountains were splitting, and all eyes turned to the gate of the field.

The five sons of Pandu were gathered about Drona, like a constellation encircling the moon. The Kuru brothers, with Drona's son, were gathered around the dreaded Duryodhan, like the gods attending Indra. They watched the advent of an unknown warrior before whom the crowds divided. It was the mighty Karna, fully accoutred in mail and rings of gold, moving majestically towards the royal tent.

Of all the assembled rulers one alone knew him, and it was fated that she, for it was Pritha, should not divulge his name and rank.

Karna won the admiration of all and inspired many hearts with fear. He seemed to possess the

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fury of an untamed elephant, the muscle of a lion, the brilliance of the sun at noontide, and at a glance one could discern in him all the manly virtues.

Proudly and calmly he looked up and down the scene of the recent martial exercises, and made a slight obeisance to Drona. Under the spell of curiosity, fear, and adoration, the throng regarded him silently. Then he addressed Arjun: 'All these feats of arms, done with useless boasting, Arjun, I can surpass. I take this mighty host to witness.'

Strange to tell, the crowd with one consent rose to its feet joyously. In the eye of Duryodhan appeared a malicious glow of hatred against his late antagonist, while Arjun's breast swelled with rage and jealousy.

At a sign from the aged Drona the arena was instantly cleared. The stranger then essayed every feat accomplished by Arjun: and each one he accomplished with ease.

Duryodhan immediately befriended the unknown warrior.

'Welcome to this land, O mighty warrior! The victor's honours are thine! Take and enjoy my kingdom, name a boon and it shall be given!'

Karna answered: 'Thy word, O Prince, is all sufficing. I seek to fight Arjun and claim the reward as victor.'

To this Duryodhan replied approvingly. 'The desire is worthy of thee. Mayst thou delight and inspire thy comrades, and fill thy foes with the fear of thy name.'

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At this Arjun's rage rekindled, and to Karna, standing triumphant and unmoved, he cried:

'Who is this braggart, that, unbidden, enters the empty lists and boasts? Witness all assembled, he shall suffer the braggart's fate.'

But Karna, unruffled, rebuked Arjun with a brave challenge: 'Arjun, the true warrior does not need thy bidding to enter the lists. My falchion is my right, just as all warriors achieve their rank by prowess, when their prowess is hallowed by their bravery. Do not deign to use the coward's wordy weapon, Arjun, but take up thy sharp arrows and speak therewith until—hear me, Drona!—thou art prostrated on the turf.'

Drona permitted the contest, and Arjun, the terror of his foes, turned from his brothers and armed himself. Karna was embraced by the Kuru princes, then with his bow and quiver he stepped forth into the lists.

Across the sky flew lines of cranes, and here and there flashes shot from the lowering clouds. Over Arjun was shed the cloudy protection which the rain-god Indra could give to his son: the clouds grew thick and dark about him. Karna was enveloped in bright sunshine, thrown around him by the god who claimed him as his son.

Duryodhan and his brothers stood by Karna, and the supporters of Arjun were Drona and Bhishma, the preceptor and aged royal warrior. The women too, were divided in their allegiance. But Pritha loved both equally, and grief overcame her. Vidura, the attendant on the monarch, saw the swooning

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queen, and hastily brought sandal-drops and waters, restoratives by which Pritha was aroused to gaze once more upon the combatants, her sons, Arjun and Karna. She uttered no sound, her tears were wept silently, for no one must discover that Karna was her eldest son.

The herald advanced on to the field, and in stentorian voice demanded to know the race and lineage of the new-comer, at the same time announcing the name and rank of Arjun.

'This is Arjun, offspring of the mighty Kuru race, the son of Pandu borne by Pritha, a prince of unchallenged descent and warlike glory. O chief, name the race of which you are the flower, name your sire and mother and the place of your birth. According to our rules of combat, Prince Arjun claims to know the rank and name of his foe, for princes may not fight with men of low degree.'

At this Karna's proud head bent with shame. He could not claim high rank, or so much as a humble place in a lineage of good standing. He bore his disgrace in silence, helpless as the lotus-flower crushed down by incessant rain.

Duryodhan quickly decided to employ for his own purposes this youth's hostility to Arjun, and therefore offered his friendship, even to the extent of raising him to royal rank. He stepped forth and cried, 'We esteem as Prince not merely the man who was born in that estate, but also the valorous leader of his forces. Karna has a rightful claim to kingship for his warlike prowess, and he shall wear a monarch's crown and shall give the law to a nation.'

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The dominion Duryodhan was thinking of was the land of Anga, and at his word the attendants immediately provided for the ceremony of coronation. Some brought corn, treasure, golden coins and water jars, while others placed the unknown warrior on the throne. The Brahmans proceeded to chant the sacred mantras according to the ordained rites, and, with the red umbrella and chowri fan duly waving, Karna was anointed king of Anga.

As the concluding blessings died away, Karna gathered his robes about him and approached Duryodhan to address him.

'The gift of a kingdom, O Duryodhan, bespeaks your nobleness; but what can the humble Karna do to requite you?'

'Be my friend,' said Duryodhan, 'that is all I wish for. Let Karna be the ally of Duryodhan, his brave and true friend.'

'Be it so,' replied Karna, with the grace of a king, and the two monarchs embraced in sight of the whole assembly.

Scarcely had they separated when a lowly charioteer approached. Tired, with beads of sweat on his face, scantily clad, and leaning for support upon a rude staff, he presented a great contrast to the youthful monarchs. Karna, to the surprise of everyone, hastened to the charioteer, whose name was Sutra, and bowed his crowned head before him as a son to a father. Sutra greeted Karna with all the pride of a father at the glory of his son. He pressed the monarch's head to his bosom and bedewed it with tears of joy.

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Meanwhile the suspicion of the Pandav brothers was rising. 'Is he the son of a charioteer?' they questioned. Bhima gave voice to his doubts: 'Do you wish to cross swords with the Kurus, you whose descent is so high? It seems that the goad of the driver would suit your hand better than a weapon! Do you think you can control the welfare of a nation? Yes, in the same way that the jackal treats the sacrificial offering at the jungle shrine!'

For a moment Karna's lip quivered in anger, but he gave no answer. He sighed and his frame shook, and for consolation his eyes rested on the sun.

Looking as glorious as a magnificent elephant rising from a lilied lake, Duryodhan arose from his brothers and proudly rebuked the scornful Bhima. 'It is not fitting,' he said, 'for you, a warrior of renown, to seek to grieve a brave man. By his noble deeds and not by his origin do we judge a warrior. The proudest chief may well be matched against the humblest warrior. Drona, our revered preceptor, is of lowly birth, and Kripa, the noblest of the Gautamas, springs from the soil. I know, too, your own race, Bhima, and that of your four brothers—it is said that the gods are your fathers. But look upon Karna in his kingly ornaments, and consider whether the deer, in her lowly lair, gives birth to the majestic tiger. Karna comes to rule not only Anga, but the whole world by his strength and virtue; and further, if any prince or chief dares gainsay my word or deed, let him take his bow and quiver and meet me in the combat.'

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III

TREACHERY

The Fire at Varnavata—Draupadi—The Wedding Assembly—The Bride.

THE people rejoiced to hear Duryodhan's challenge, and cheered loudly.

By this time the sun had set, and the red lamp threw fitful gleams on the assembly as Duryodhan with Karna slowly left the ground. The Pandav brothers, with Drona, Kripa and Bhishma, also departed together and silently, wondering what the future could hold for them.

The populace, commenting on the tournament, variously gave the credit, these to Arjun, those to Karna, and others to Duryodhan. Pritha, assured by some hidden sign or feeling that Karna was her son, felt proud that he was now King of Anga; but her joy was not greater than that of Duryodhan, who, allied to Karna, now no longer feared the skill of Arjun.

And as for Arjun, even Yudhishthir began to lose faith in him, and to reckon Karna as the greatest warrior on the earth.

Some time elapsed and the jealousies of the

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cousins were somewhat healed, when a neighbouring king, Drupad of the country of Panchala, offended the Kurus by reason of an insult to Drona. In the war that ensued the Kuru princes and the Pandav brethren led, and Drupad was captured, largely, however, by the prowess of the Pandavs. The victorious armies returned, and at the conclusion of peace Drupad retained a half of his former kingdom.

At this time Dhrita-rashtra raised Yudhishthir, the eldest of all the princes, to be heir-apparent. Immediately the old jealousy of Duryodhan returned, and he devised plans to remove all obstacles from the path of his ambition.

Duryodhan built a palace in Varnavata, a distant city, and by some means he persuaded the five brothers and Pritha to go and stay there. He intended that they should be burned alive, and therefore had the place specially constructed of very inflammable material. But Yudhishthir and his brothers were warned on the journey, and having arrived at the palace, they dug a subterranean passage as a way of escape.

At last the day arrived when the burning was to take place. The Pandavs, however, began the fire themselves, and escaped with their mother to the forests. It happened that night a lowly woman and her five sons, wandering homeless, entered the sumptuous palace, and suddenly finding themselves in the midst of plenty, gave way to feasting and drinking. When the fire crept about them, they were already stupefied and perished in the flames. Next morning,

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when the townspeople visited the debris, the charred remains of a woman and five young men were discovered by the horrified searchers, and Dhrita-rashtra came to the conclusion that the lives lost were those of Pritha and the five brothers. Duryodhan and his brothers did nothing to alleviate the old king's anguish, and the funeral ceremonies for the royal dead were duly performed with general lamentation throughout the city.

The Pandav brethren, however, were wandering safe in the forest, disguised as Brahmans. After a time they reached the town of Ekachakra, where they resided and tended the needs of the people, who, in return, grew to love them.

From time to time the pious brothers were visited by various holy men, particularly the rishi Narada, who gave the young men hope for the future, and also unveiled something of their destiny, for by his piety he had attained the power of seeing into the future.

The conversation turning to Drupad, the king of Panchala, Narada informed the wanderers that in a previous existence his daughter, Draupadi, had been the daughter of a rishi, and he related a curse that had been placed upon her for some misdeed that had occurred in a still earlier life. It had been pronounced that she should never have a husband.

Draupadi, however, tried to atone for what she had done amiss, and she was promised a boon for her attentions to the god Siva.

'Grant me a husband! Grant me a husband!'

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she cried, and in her eagerness she preferred the petition five times.

Siva granted this boon, but according to the number of times she made the request she was to have five husbands.

Narada concluded by saying that the prophecy would be fulfilled by the five wanderers, and he added, 'Go, therefore, towards Panchala and await the turn of events.'

The five youths and Pritha were one day journeying through the forest paths, when they were hailed by a group of Brahmans bound for South Panchala. In answer to their questions, Yudhishthir said he and his companions had come from Ekachakra and were travelling to a distant land.

'Do you not know,' replied the Brahmans, 'that the king of Panchala is about to hold a feast? It is the swayamvara of the Princess Draupadi, a maid whom no human mother bore, but who sprang from the altar. Her eyes are soft as the lotus petal, and as with the fragrance of the blue lotus her presence makes the air sweet. She is to choose a husband from the nobles who will come from far and near, and the royal wedding will be brilliant with beauty and bravery. Many kings will be present, countless chiefs will arrive in richly wrought chariots. Bounty will be showered in all directions; food, milch-kine, jewels and raiment will be given with royal generosity.

'We as Brahmans will receive our share, and will depart with gladsome hearts. Journey there with us, O brothers, witness the contests and partake of the

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feast. Who knows but that the princess may select her bridegroom from among you, for you are gifted with manly beauty and prowess? It may be that this mighty-armed youth will win the prize by his valour.'

Yudhishthir replied for the brothers: 'We will go and see the things you have described—the wedding and the feast.'

Accordingly they set out with the friendly Brahmans, and before they had gone very far the world-famed rishi, Vyasa, stood before them in the path. All the princes bowed to the holy figure, who blessed them, saying that they did right to go to Panchala.

In a happy frame of mind they marched on through the woods and past the lakes, staying at the wayside shrines, and conversing of the sacred subjects of their scriptures. At last they reached Panchala, a spacious town with a market. They admired the fortress, the bazaars, the residential quarters, and the spire and dome. But they passed the great buildings and sought rest and shelter in the humble home of a potter. No one guessed these five, begging bread, were Kuru princes in the guise of Brahmans.

Drupad, in the conflict with the Kuru sovereign, had reason to know of the martial bearing, prowess and nobility of Arjun, and to this youth he wished to give his daughter—a maiden with whom none could compare. To this end he devised a trial of strength and skill, in the hope that Arjun would compete and succeed where men of acknowledged strength would fail.

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He made a bow of exceedingly tough wood : it was thought no one would ever be able to bend this bow. That was merely the beginning of the trial, for Drupad caused a whirling discus to be hung in the open air, and high up at a great distance beyond this a target was fixed.

Then Drupad sent emissaries to every town and country to deliver the message, proclaiming the conditions of the contest : 'Whoso shall string this bow, and shoot an arrow through the whirling discus and pierce the target, shall win as bride the princess of Panchala.'

In response, as the Brahmans had told the Pandav brothers, kings, princes and warriors arrived, and priestly counsellors came to bless the ceremony. Among others came Duryodhan and his Kuru brothers, feeling matchless in their pride and strength, and Karna accompanied them.

Drupad greeted all these as honoured guests. Around the stadium could be heard the murmur of men like the voice of ocean, as the platforms and stages were rapidly filled. Royal guests and suitors entered the halls in high ceremony, chiefs drove up in ponderous cars, and mailed warriors were intent upon the business of the day.

To the north-east of the city a level expanse of ground had been enclosed, and a lofty dome and stately palace had been erected for the occasion. Round the field a moat was dug and the wall within had a gate with an arched door.

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The day of the bride's choice is near! Another group of workers are beautifying the place of assembly. Censers are lighted. Sandal oil with its cooling fragrance is sprinkled; scented wreaths are hung. The aspect of the white palaces from the centre of the ground is like that of the mountain Kailasa. Within, the rooms glisten with precious stones and the sunlight filters through golden curtains; while outside, the turrets of the royal house are gilded and gleam in the sunrise like the summits of the Himalayas.

For fifteen days the guests passed in and out of the gem-adorned apartments, ascended the carpeted stairs to obtain audience of the king, or sat in contemplation of the mighty Brahma.

The crowds were diverted by dancers, jugglers and singers, while the sons of Pandu mixed with the Brahmans, whose habit they still wore, and were amazed at the wealth and splendour of Drupad's court.

The long-awaited day dawned, and was heralded joyfully with drum and sankha. The bride had performed her morning ablutions and came forth, gracefully clad in garments and garlands that befitted the day. Then an aged Brahman lit the sacrificial fire and made offerings to ask blessings on the princess. His benedictions were re-echoed in the whispered prayers of all the attending and watching priests. No shell, trumpet or drum was heard, and all eyes were directed to the princess.

She was led forward, a lovely bride, by her brother who boldly proclaimed his father's decree.

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He showed the bow to the assembly, and said: 'Whoever, being born of noble race, shall bend the bow and through the whirling discus shoot five arrows which hit the target on high, he shall take the beauteous princess of Panchala as his meed.'

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IV

WINNING A WIFE

The Suitors—The Disguised Arjun—The Tumult—The Gift in common.

THE prince of Panchala, whose name was Dhrishtadyumna, proclaimed the name and rank of the several suitors, recounting also their feats of war.

The young men gazed on the wonderful beauty of the maiden, and love rose in their breasts, and as each man felt conscious of his own worth, he regarded his competitors with a feeling akin to anger. It might be said they grew restless, like the young elephants on the mountain sides, who wait impatient for their opportunity to lead the herd. In imagination, each man thought the fair Draupadi already his wife or queen, and every man his foe. They rose, without signal, and stepped towards the object of their passion, striving one with another as did the gods when fired by Uma's love.

The gods themselves were riding the clouds to watch the scene, and the lesser deities—the celestial birds, the Nagas of the lower world, the heavenly musicians and nymphs of the sky—were present, though invisible.

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Valadeva, armed with a ploughshare, stood with Krishna and his kinsmen. Krishna was not deceived by the disguise adopted by the Pandavs. He saw them eagerly gazing at the maiden as an elephant longs for the lotus, or the unseen fire waits to consume dry wood. Krishna, pleased and surprised, pointed them out to Valadeva, but all the chieftains were so rapt in their thoughts of Draupadi that no one else pierced the disguise of the five silent princes.

Meanwhile they were deeper in their passion than before; truly they were smitten by Kandarpa's dart.

Blossoms from the chariots of the immortals were showered upon the assembly, sweet scents perfumed the air and music gently floated in the breezes, which wafted favour from on high.

The suitors one by one came forward. They looked at the mark, and with the fullest determination attempted to bend the bow. Many of the chiefs were of wide fame, and proud they looked in rich apparel and chains of gold. They put forth all their strength, but to conquer a hundred enemies would have been a simpler task. Some of them, although men of marvellous strength, could not bend the bow in the least. Others succeeded in bending the bow slightly, but on exerting themselves still further they lost foothold, the bow sprang back to its first position, and the archers were thrown to the ground by the shock of the rebound. Crowns were scattered, chains of gold were broken, pearls and gems were strewn on the grass, as one after another the proud warriors met their shame. Humiliated, they left the field, never to think again of Panchala's fair bride.

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At length, Karna drew near. He was the proudest archer on the field. He bent the bow, fixed the string and placed the arrows in readiness to shoot. As he stood, bright and radiant as Surya, the sun, a word of doubt, a tribute to his proven prowess, escaped the lips of the Pandavs: 'Surely Karna must hit the target!'

Before Karna shot, Draupadi rose and spoke.

'I, daughter of a monarch, a Kshatra by birth, will not wed the son of Sutra, the charioteer.'

Karna, thus disqualified at the moment of success, heard the words of condemnation, his brow red with shame. He set down the circled bow and retired, gazing upon the sun.

After the denial of Karna, the monarch of Chedi, a very important state, came up to the bow. Although other kings had failed, Sisupala thought he was able to perform the task. Therefore he took up the bow, but his pride was speedily abased. The bow rebounded and threw him to the earth.

Jarasandha, a sturdy monarch, who stood as bold as a cliff, was likewise thrown, and he hurried away.

Salya, king of Madra, who had come in a wonderful chariot, faltered as he was bending the bow, and fell on his hands and knees.

By this time, the populace had seen so many promising knights humiliated, that it was becoming a matter of amusement to them. They joked about the warriors, and presently muffled laughter was heard at each failure.

But suddenly all laughter and complaints ceased.

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A man had stepped forward out of the ranks of the Brahmans. So godlike, calm and beautiful he seemed, that the Brahmans cheered him and waved their deerskins.

Some there were who fancied that their dignity as priests was lightly set at stake by the serene youth.

'Is it possible,' they said, 'that, where Sisupala and Salya fail, a Brahman, untrained to warlike feats and by nature not of the strongest, shall succeed? Because a boy in his rashness commits a folly we shall all be shamed. The wiser men among us ought to stop him to save our honour.'

Others replied, 'He will not bring us shame, but honour, renown and reward. Look at him, standing like the peak of Everest: what ample shoulders, what a deep chest! He walks like a lion and carries an air of determination. He that hath the will to dare can perform high enterprise.'

'He will succeed. Moreover, you do wrong to say there is any task a Brahman cannot do. Think of the kings who have been compelled by Brahmans. Remember Saint Agastya drained the ocean dry. Let this young Brahman go in and win the reward.'

Meanwhile Arjun shared none of these fears. He stood beside the bow for a while, and then went round it three times; after which he bent in a silent prayer to Isana, the god of gods. Then Arjun, son of Indra, and endowed with Vishnu's strength, took up the bow of Drupad, bent it, fixed the string and placed the five arrows.

Quickly he shot them through the wheel, and all

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hit the target, finally bringing it down to the ground with a loud crash.

Draupadi smiled sweetly and graciously upon him, and completed the ceremony of making known her choice by throwing upon him the bridal garland and giving him the bridal gown she had worn. Thereupon King Drupad advanced to embrace Arjun. Shouts of joy arose from the thousands of watchers, and the celestial witnesses also showed their pleasure. Under the loud sound of the sankha and trumpet there gathered a whisper of annoyance and rage from the defeated suitors. Drupad recognized the hero in his disguise, and saw that the growing resentment of the disappointed chiefs boded no good to Arjun. Yudhishthir, together with the youngest of the five brothers, observed what was afoot, and Bhima also rose and stood by Arjun. It was not long before the rage of the defeated contestants found voice, and they made complaint to Drupad. 'Shall the king trample upon us as on the grass of the field, that he thinks to join his daughter to a poor chattering priest? Shall there be no fruition to our hopes? The king, who in his pride insults kings, shall die as a traitor. We cannot respect his rank, or his age. He is the enemy of kings and must be slain. He has invited us to his palace, feasted us royally and acted graciously these many days. With what purpose? Only to make our disgrace the keener, because, forsooth, he finds that none of us is peer to his daughter!'

Thus they went on angrily.

'It is ordained that the swayamvara is for the

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warrior caste alone : that the priest shall not take part therein. Therefore, if this maiden has sinfully thought of a Brahman, let her be led to the pyre.'

'As for the priest, he is besotted. He sins through hope of gain, but we forgive him, having no mind to war with priests. Gratitude forbids that the blood of a priest or preceptor should be shed in strife. Therefore, with the blood of Drupad will we keep the ancient laws, lest to the monarchs of the future similar contempt should be shown.'

Thoroughly incensed, the kings rushed in the direction of Drupad, who stood trembling for a moment amidst the Brahmans. Drupad was overcome with fear, and turned and fled. To meet the onrush of maddened fighters, Bhima and Arjun rose and stood side by side. The rage of the horde increased, and, forgetting Drupad, the monarchs rushed to wreak vengeance upon the two brothers.

Bhima, having neglected to bring a weapon, glanced aside and, seeing a tree near, tore it out of the ground, poised it in his hand and shook it like a stick. There he stood, a silent challenge to the raging army. Meanwhile, Arjun held the bow.

Krishna, with keen observation, had noticed everything, and having pointed out to his brother, Valadeva, the hemlet-wearing Arjun, the tiger-waisted Bhima and the pious-souled Yudhishthir, he intervened. After some time Krishna succeeded in restoring peace. The monarchs yielded to his persuasion, and soon afterwards left Panchala.

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Arjun took Draupadi by the hand and led her away.

Pritha, the mother of the five brethren, awaited their return in the house of the potter. Living as Brahmans, they begged alms, as was the custom, and on this occasion one of the brothers said to Pritha, 'We have received a great gift to-day.'

She had not, up to that moment, seen Draupadi, so took the words in their usual meaning, and replied, 'Enjoy ye the gift in common.'

This simple speech proved to be of extreme importance in the lives of the five, as it was the fulfilment of the prophecy spoken by the rishi Narada. The word of a mother was law and could not be set aside. Thus the gift, Draupadi, was to be shared among them; and so Draupadi received five husbands.

Pritha was much perturbed at the meaning her words carried; but there was no help for it, and they fell to conversing about the contests, unaware that someone was listening outside the door.

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V

YUDHISHTHIR BECOMES EMPEROR

Return to Hastina—Kuru Kingdom divided—The Imperial Sacrifice—Narada's Vision.

DHRISHTADYUMNA, the son of Drupad and brother of Draupadi, was sent by the king to discover, if he could, the true rank of Arjun. He followed the supposed Brahmans, and when he heard their talk of arms and noble deeds, he thought of the Pandav brothers, and told his father what his conclusions were.

Drupad was joyful to hear this, and sent a suitable escort to bring them to the palace. The idea of the princess marrying all five was very strange to him: such a proposal had not been made at any earlier time, nor has it occurred in India since.

Yudhishthir, however, pointed out that it was the fulfilment of the prophecy, and the ceremony was proceeded with. Each of the brothers led Draupadi thrice round the sacrificial fire, and at the close of the wedding Drupad gave them rich gifts. Krishna, one of the gods, then in human form, also blessed them by his presence and gifts.

The fame of the winners of Draupadi spread far and wide, and the old blind king Dhrita-rashtra

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heard that the Pandavs were still alive. He called a council together, and they debated what should be done.

Duryodhan and his friend Karna were full of enmity towards them, but their advice was overruled by wiser counsellors. It was decided that a portion of the kingdom should be given to the Pandavs. Duryodhan, who was chagrined at the failure of his plot at Varanavata, and dismayed because his cousins had a strong ally in Drupad, took the richer portion of the kingdom. The eastern part, with the capital Hastinapura on the Ganges, was reserved to him, while the Pandavs took the forest land and wilderness on the west by the river Jumna.

They set to work with good will and cleared the forest. Next they erected a fine city deemed worthy of Indra, and called it Indraprastha. In later ages Indraprastha became Delhi, and still there are ruins near Delhi pointed out as the remains of the glorious city of the sons of Pandu.

It was difficult for the five princes to live in perfect peace, seeing that Draupadi was the wife of each of them, and lest they should become jealous, the rishi Narada advised them against the beginning of strife on this account. The brothers took the lesson to heart, and made a compact of friendship among themselves.

On one occasion, however, Arjun was in the forest when he saw a band of robbers despoiling some Brahmans of their goods. Returning home for his weapons, he went into the room where Yudhishthir and Draupadi were conversing.

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Thus, to save the Brahmans, Arjun brought himself under the penalty which had been agreed upon. His brothers begged him to set it aside, as they fully understood the motive of his intrusion. but this proposal his conception of the duty of a warrior would not allow him to consider. He therefore voluntarily undertook to go away in the forests for the space of twelve years.

During this time he visited Dwarka, the land over which Krishna ruled, and contested for Krishna's sister, Subhadra, and married her. A son was born to him, who became a great warrior in the wars wherein Arjun was a leader.

Years went by and he at last returned, bringing his wife and boy. After the first moment's hesitation, Draupadi was won by Subhadra's manner, and the latter became a happy member of the family.

Soon after this Arjun won the favour of Agni, the god of Fire. The forests near Indraprastha were consumed in a forest fire by Agni, against the will of Indra, who, being the god of Thunder and Rain, endeavoured to prevent the destruction. Arjun assisted Agni, who succeeded; and the god gave Arjun a bow named Gandiva and two quivers of arrows.

While the forest was burning, a giant named Maya had a great difficulty in escaping, but the brothers helped him, and in return he built them a great palace.

Yudhishthir was now king of Indraprastha, and decided to perform the Rajasuya sacrifice; in other words, to assume imperial rank over all the kings.

Krishna advised him that his main enemy would be Jarasandha, the king of what is now South Behar.

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His four brothers led troops in every direction. It was Bhima's task to fight Jarasandha, and after a fierce hand-to-hand fight he was overcome and slain. All the other monarchs recognized Yudhishthir's supremacy and brought tributes to the sacrifice.

Nakula, one of the Pandav twins, went to Hastinapura and courteously invited Dhrita-rashtra and his sons. They accepted, and were amazed and delighted to see the new palaces, which overlooked the blue waters of the Jumna. The aged preceptors, Kripa. Bhishma and Drona, accompanied the king of the Kurus, and Duryodhan, though consumed with envy, walked in the palace with a smiling face. Drupad, with the princes of Panchala, and Sisupala and his gold-decked son were there. From all corners of the earth came rulers of many peoples.

So in the palace on the banks of the Jumna the monarchs met to hail Yudhishthir as the great king. He assigned to each of them a beautiful palace with its gardens and fountains. From a distance the domes, turrets and roofs of the white mansions appeared like the ranges of Himalaya.

Within everything was luxurious. Curtains of netted gold hung at the casements, jewels were set in the walls, rich carpets covered the stair-cases, and across the halls festoons of flowers were arranged. Bright as the palaces were with gems and flowers, the scene when the monarchs and rishis were assembled would compare with the sky when the stars shine clear in the azure.

Yudhishthir addressed the august assembly :

' Friends and kinsmen, be always favourable and

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loving to me; extend your kindness to me during the ceremony. As for my treasure, use it as your own and spare no gifts to the poor.'

So saying, he began the initiation of the rite, and assigned each friend some share in the celebration. Duh-sasan, brother of Duryodhan, spread the feast; Drona's son greeted the priests; Kripa took charge of the treasure, which amounted to untold wealth, including many gems, and it was his task to give presents to the Brahmans, according to the ordained rite, thus sanctifying the sacrifice. Sahadeva, the twin brother of Nakula, was asked to bestow the offerings. The blind old king, Dhrita-rashtra, went up and down the hall as he wished, while Vidura, usually his guide, acted as the steward for the occasion. Duryodhan received the tribute, a thousand coins of each monarch; and Krishna piously made obeisance to the Brahmans.

The sacred Jumna that day saw a wonderful gathering of warlike nobility, great chieftains and mighty rulers. The sky was filled with the brightness of the immortals.

The Brahmans, many of them of great fame for learning and virtue, discussed the scriptures. One party disputed on the Laws of Duty, another considered the Holy Vows, while some went deeply into the meanings of words in the old texts. In all their company was no man of impure life or caste.

Of all present the most saintly was the deva-rishi Narada, who stood contemplating the sacrifice. To him a vision was vouchsafed. As he looked upon the bright assembly, a celestial voice told him they

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were gods incarnate. He saw them as embodiments of heavenly spirits. And Krishna, the lotus-eyed, he knew to be the Highest—Brahma.

He saw the World's Preserver, the great Primal Cause; and the kings, it was revealed to him, were his messengers sent in order to fulfil Brahma's will. They were to wage a deadly war against sin, to perish in the cause, and afterwards to return to the regions of brightness.

The voice continued:

'The Preserver of the World sent down immortal gods to earth, and himself hath assumed the guise of mortal in the race of Yadu, like the moon among the planets—He whom the gods worship, Narayana, Son of Man, He the Primal Cause and Self-created.

When His holy plan is finished, Narayana will take again the Immortals to their home in the sky.'

This and other glimpses of the mind of Brahma were given to Narada as he contemplated the sacrifice.

Presently Bhishma reminded Yudhishthir of the custom of Arghya or the offering made to an honoured guest. 'O Sovereign of the great realm,' he said, 'our laws ordain that Arghya is due to guests of honour. It is due to the preceptor, kinsman, priest, to friend and man of learning, and to the king.

'Here are crowned kings, pre-eminent for honour and nobility. Let the Arghya be given to the noblest and most virtuous first.'

Yudhishthir answered, 'Who is the noblest and most virtuous? Who of all the crowned kings shall claim the highest degree of honour?'

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In answer to Yudhishthir's question who should first receive the guest offering, Bhishma, who was entitled by his great age and experience to express an opinion, said that Krishna was the greatest among the great.

'Amid these kings, bright with purity, Krishna is like the sun among the planets. Just as the bleak region produces verdure when the sun's rays return, so this, your sacrificial day is made splendid and holy by the presence of Krishna.'

At this speech Sahadeva waited no longer, but poured out the Arghya offering before Krishna. As the disguised god took the offering, Sisupala's brow clouded and he shook with rage.

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VI

A FATAL PASSION

Sisupala's Pride—Krishna's Wrath—Parting Blessings—The Game of Dice.

SISUPALA, king of Chedi, had been one of the unsuccessful suitors at Draupadi's swayamvara. At Bhishma's mention of Krishna as the most honoured guest, he glanced at Yudhishthir and Bhishma, then cried angrily to Krishna—

'This honour ought not to be given to Krishna. In the first place, he does not wear a crown and he is in the company of several kings. It does not behove Yudhishthir, the son of Pandu, to render homage to an uncrowned chief. But the mistake is not really his. The sons of Pandu have not yet been thoroughly taught the conduct of life. They do not possess the blessing of knowledge.

'The fault lies with Bhishma. He has broken the rules of courts. Though acquainted with the Laws of Duty, he departs from them owing to his bias. Such an act gives rise to bad feeling and stirs us up to hatred. In this company we have many crowned kings and famous rulers. Can Krishna, uncrowned, claim the precedence over these?

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'If he makes his claim as a sage, ought not the father to be preferred to the son? If he thinks he ought to be first because of being kinsman to Yudhishthir, what must we say of Drupad, whose daughter the king has married? Does he accept this high honour because he is a wiser preceptor? We have Drona here. His claim as a rishi falls before that of Vyasa, whom heaven has inspired.

'Has Krishna pre-eminence as a warrior? Bhishma is indeed the first in warlike fame. The son of Drona is superior to Krishna in knowledge. Among the princes Duryodhan stands without an equal. Of the priests Kripa is the holiest. And Karna is the foremost archer.

'Why should we give the honour and homage to Krishna? He is foremost neither as priest, preceptor, king nor chief!'

Krishna answered calmly, but his eyes shone.

'Listen to me, righteous friends! Sisupala is the son of one of the daughters of our race; therefore in spite of his many insults and outrages I have never thought to do him harm. On one occasion, when I was absent in the east, Sisupala made himself my foe and burnt my sea-port, Dwarka, razing the market and temple to the ground.

'Sisupala once broke faith with the king of Bhoja, killed his attendants and threw him into a dungeon. My father, wishing to perform the horse-sacrifice, duly drove his charger forth. Sisupala captured the steed and stole it, thus hindering the piety of Vasudeva and becoming a thief. He has insulted he wife of Babhru and deceived Visala's princess.

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All these things I have overlooked since his mother is of our kin, but Sisupala goes on in his sinful ways.

'Giving way to his passion, he has tried to break the faithfulness of my consort. Like the low-born, who breathes upon the sacred screed, he is a spoiler of holy things, and he deserves to meet his doom.'

As Krishna spoke, the crimson points of fire rose in the cheeks of the brave warriors and monarchs, ashamed for Sisupala's lack of honour and angry at his presumption.

The monarch of Chedi, however, cared nothing for his shame or their anger. He laughed in his pride and sneered at Krishna. 'Why do you proclaim your shame to this great and noble gathering? A man of sense would keep these things secret. Punish me if you can! I shall not be won over by patience or by anger. I ask no mercy and I do not stand in awe of Krishna.'

Krishna lowered his eye and took into his hand the dreadful disc that never missed its aim. He addressed the noble company:

'Kings and princes! Thus many times hath the wicked Sisupala defied Krishna's righteous anger. He hath been safe because it was promised to his mother that his hundred follies would be forgiven by Krishna. But now he hath far exceeded the bounds set by my forbearance, and he shall fall to this weapon of vengeance.'

So saying, Krishna threw the discus, and Sisupala fell, his head severed from his body. He lay like a rock which a tempest splits from a mountain. His soul, now cleansed of all lust and impurity, issued

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from its earthly shroud as the bright sun mounts over a dark cloud, and like a vivid flash the spirit went to Krishna, who took it to his bosom.

At that instant the rain fell. Lightnings and thunders tore the sky and a tremor passed over the earth. For some minutes there was silence, while all the assembled crowd looked upon the dead monarch.

Some of those who witnessed the deed bit their lips in anger and grasped their weapons with trembling hands. Others felt that Krishna's deed was one of justice, and regarded the death of Sisupala as the fitting close of a sinful career. As the rishis departed they blessed Krishna, and the Brahmans sang his praises.

Yudhishthir turned to his brothers and ordered Sisupala's funeral rites to be performed with regal honours. This was done with due regard to the rank of the dead king, and afterwards the sacred ablutions of coronation were performed, and Sisupala's son was made king of Chedi.

This unpleasing episode ended, Yudhishthir proceeded with the stages of the Arghya sacrifice, Krishna looking on. The Brahmans sprinkled the lord of empire with holy water, and the attending monarchs rose and made obeisance.

'Born of a high and noble race,' they said in accents musical and graceful, 'you have attained a still higher name by your natural virtue: and this offering adds further grace to your condition. We find your kingly qualities all that we could wish and hope. Give us now your permission, O mighty Emperor, to return to our own lands with your blessing.'

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Yudhishthir, with due honours, bade farewell to the monarchs and asked his brothers to accompany them. 'From the love and loyalty of their hearts these monarchs came to our festival: let our friends escort them to the boundaries of their kingdoms.'

The brothers readily undertook this request. Arjun went with Drupad, Bhima accompanied Bhishma and the aged king of Kuru, Sahadeva escorted Drona; other visitors were honoured by Nakula and Yudhishthir's chiefs.

The farewell of Krishna, the last to depart, was marked by great mutual benevolence.

'Now that the rajasuya is finished,' said the incarnate god, 'permit me, O joy and pride of thy race, to depart to Dwarka.'

Yudhishthir found the parting sad. 'It is by thy grace and valour, and by the favour of thy presence, that I have been able to accomplish these things. To thy glory I owe the fact that these monarchs own my sway. Must thou go? Not by words of mine, for without thee this were an empty empire and my life one of woe. Still, it must be. Krishna, my dearest friend, must go to his city by the sea.'

Krishna then went to take leave of Pritha, the mother of the Pandav brothers. He said to the dame 'May the kingly glory of thy sons rejoice thee! Rejoice in their skill and spotless reputation. May thy widow's heart be solaced by thy sons' triumphs! Bid me farewell, noble lady, for I must go.'

He next took leave of Yudhishthir's queen, Draupadi, and then of Subhadra, his sister, now the wife of Arjun, and still always dear to him.

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While the last ceremonies were being performed, Krishna's charioteer brought the car with its falcon banners, the car that was huge as a cloud and overpowering in war. He mounted, and after a last farewell was driven a few paces along the bank of the Jumna, and Yudhishthir and his brothers, sad at heart, walked in the same direction.

Krishna stopped and turned to them, giving his parting words, in a calm and clear voice.

'Mighty king, guard thy fair kingdom with sleepless care. Watch thy subjects' welfare like a father and with all a father's love. Be to them like the raindrop to the thirsty ground. Be the tree of shelter in the heat. As the blue sky bends over the earth, so be kind to thy subjects. Rule thy kingdom virtuously and with a mind that knows no passion or pride.'

And so Krishna went his way, and Yudhishthir with a full heart returned home.

On the way to Hastina-pura, Duryodhan brooded over the greatness of his old-time friends. His heart burned with a fierce jealousy against Yudhishthir, and he plotted his downfall. Sakuni, prince of Gandhara in the west, one who was present at the imperial sacrifice, also hated the Pandav brothers, and he helped the jealous Kuru prince in a dark scheme.

Like most of the monarchs of the time, Yudhishthir loved gambling. In this practice Sakuni was not only clever, but an unprincipled cheat. He therefore suggested that Duryodhan should challenge Yudhishthir to gamble with the dice. Duryodhan calculated that Yudhishthir's strict and peculiar code of honour would enforce him to accept this, as any other

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challenge, and he relied on rousing Yudhishthir's passion for gambling when once the game began. The invitation was duly sent to the Pandavs.

In reply Yudhishthir spoke of the folly of gambling, but he felt it to be a point of honour to accept the challenge. He therefore went to Hastina-pura with Draupadi, his mother and brothers.

The dicing soon began, and Yudhishthir lost almost every throw. His gold and jewels were quickly forfeited. Next his horses, elephants and cars, and his slaves were staked and lost.

Chagrined at his losses, he continued to play, and for higher stakes. He played for his capital city and its wealth: he lost his whole empire besides. Still he played. He staked and lost his brothers, and then himself.

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VII

CRUEL INSULTS

Draupadi in the Council Hall—Her Plaint—Bhima's Vow—Dhrita-rashtra's Kindness.

As the game proceeded, Yudhishthir grew mad with the excitement of gambling, and staked the only possession he still owned. Thus he lost Draupadi into slavery.

The Emperor of Indraprastha and his family were thenceforward to be bond-men and bond-women to Duryodhan.

Queen Draupadi was sitting in her apartments in the palace of Hastina-pura, unaware of what had taken place, when a servant of Duryodhan approached with a message from his master.

'I crave your pardon, Empress, the monarch of Indraprastha has lost both game and senses. You were held at stake and won.'

In deep anguish Draupadi answered:

'Have I heard you rightly? A crowned king does not stake his queen or a husband lose his wife! My noble husband must have lost his senses, that he thought of no other stake but his wife!'

The servant groaned with sorrow as he answered,

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'There were other stakes, O Queen. Yudhishthir staked his wealth, his empire and all his possessions. He then lost himself and all his brothers, who are now bondsmen. Then he staked his wife, and you have become Duryodhan's slave.'

Draupadi rose, and with the pride of a woman and the anger of a queen replied, 'Haste to your master, slave, and take Queen Draupadi's answer. If Yudhishthir as a bondsman afterwards staked his queen and wife, the stake was null: for a bondsman owns nothing, neither wealth nor the life of another. A slave can wager nothing, and the play comes to naught. Tell Prince Duryodhan, Queen Draupadi is free.'

This bold answer roused Duryodhan's evil nature. Turning to his brother, Duh-sasan, he roared, 'The servant is a man of servile mind. He lives in terror of Bhima. Go, Duh-sasan, and bid the princess come as our humble slave. The sons of Pandu are no longer free agents, and there is no fear in your heart.'

Duh-sasan did not need twice telling. He hurried to the women's apartments, and the fierce aspect of his bloodshot eyes told the maids that his visit was evil-omened.

No man was expected thus to intrude upon the inner rooms, and Draupadi at that moment would not have been deemed suitably clad to appear in a council chamber. Such considerations, however, did not deter the uncouth prince, whose only object was to break the queen-wife's independence and to take her to Duryodhan.

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'Beautiful princess of Panchala,' he cried, with more of insult than respect, 'won by Duryodhan at the dice, arise at once and greet your lord. Get rid of your blushes. Come and serve us, be our pretty waiting-maid.'

Draupadi, as if hurt by the sight of this man, shaded her eyes with her hand. Her cheeks became deathly white, and her heart grew sick within her. In a movement she turned to run to the rooms of the women, but in vain. Duh-sasan caught her by her floating hair.

Little he cared that those raven tresses had been sanctified with holy water at the imperial sacrifice. He feared no vengeance from the Pandav brothers. He dragged her from her carpet, across the floor towards the Council Chamber. The outraged woman shook like a young tree in a tempest. She stooped in anguish, and with many tears besought Duh-sasan to leave her.

'Have you no shame, Duh-sasan, that you would drag a loosely clothed woman before the elders and princes?'

Her soft words had no effect on the brutal captor, who mocked her pitiful state.

'Loosely clad or not, you shall go to the Council Chamber, slave girl. You were fairly staked and won. Do your master's bidding. You shall live with our slaves and serve us.'

With dress disarranged and hair trailing down, Draupadi dragged herself along after Duh-sasan.

'Fathers,' she cried, 'forgive me for this disrespectful appearance! Duh-sasan, refrain from

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touching me : a woman's hair is sacred. Honoured sires, I beseech you to protect me. Are you not afraid of vengeance from on high ?

'There is my husband, Yudhishthir ; no sin stains his soul.

'What ! Is there none of you will save me from shame ? Is there no chief here will save a woman's life ? Is there no hand or voice to defend a wife who esteems her honour higher than her life ? Alas, the glory of the Kurus is gone ; the name of Bharat is disgraced for ever ; the Kshatras' prowess is a thing of naught.

'If it were not so, why would a Kuru warrior merely look on at the shaming of a woman ? Why do not your weapons gleam in the cause of a faithful queen ?

'Is Bhishma's goodness gone ? Has Drona lost his ancient power ? Has the monarch of the Kurus ceased to care and to battle for the just ? Why do ye silently look on ? Why are your eyes fixed and still and expressionless as those of the dead, and your right arms, are they palsied while you witness the shameful deed of the Kuru ?'

Draupadi's anger burned and the tear was in her eye. Her glances stirred the sons of Pandu to wrath. She made them thirst for vengeance. Little cared they for the loss of their empire, but her words pierced them like the dagger. The venerable Bhishma frowned. Preceptor Drona bit his tongue. Vidura turned pale as he heard the insults flung at Draupadi.

Protests would have been useless and the Pandavs

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would not speak an idle word, but one and all cursed Duh-sasan when they heard Draupadi's plea.

Karna, although a warrior, had no compassion for their great humiliation. He was the bitter foe of Arjun and heaped scorn upon the Pandav brothers.

'No one blames you, sweet princess,' he said, 'descended from your high estate. A wife, like a son, does not direct her own actions. It is the lot of others to rule them. Your husband has bargained his birthright, and has sold you too. As the husband falls, so falls the wife. Her duty is simple: she must obey. Henceforth live in the Kuru household and obey the will of the Kuru princes.'

Bhima, his forehead red with violent anger, looked the picture of rage. His bosom rose and fell, and he cast a fierce glance at Karna, but he was restrained from attacking him by Yudhishthir's promises. But at last he spoke. 'O my king and brother,' he said, 'the rage of a slave is nothing, but would that son of a charioteer taunt us thus if you had not played the stake you did?'

Yudhishthir, riven with sorrow, lowered his gaze. Duryodhan in triumph scorned the king and said, 'Answer, Yudhishthir. Your brothers still acknowledge the rule of their elder. You were ever a virtuous and truthful man. Have you forfeited your newbuilt empire and your brothers? Have you lost Draupadi? Is the woman you married our slave?'

Yudhishthir moved neither lip nor eye. He could not deny the hated truth. Karna enjoyed the Pandav's humiliation, but the manly old warrior Bhishma wiped away a tear.

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Duryodhan was suddenly overcome with madness. In an impulsive moment he drew the princess to him.

At this Bhima no longer kept silence. Like thunder his voice rolled through the hall.

'May I never meet my fathers in the bright regions on high if I do not in the battle break that knee by which you are dishonouring Draupadi!'

As the sparks fly when the tough gnarled wood crackles in the fire, so Bhima's forehead glowed with anger, his eyes sparkled red.

Silence succeeded. From the sacred chamber of the palace where the priests performed the morning and evening sacrifices, there was heard a miserable wailing of jackals, and ravens cried mournfully.

Vidura recognized the omen. Queen Gandhari also knew it. Bhishma muttered the charm 'svasti' at the unwonted sound. Drona and Kripa also breathed the word.

Queen Gandhari told her husband what she feared. Dhrita-rashtra trembled, and the same dread came upon him. His voice faltered and tears came to his eyes.

'Duryodhan,' he said, 'always a wayward child, you are inviting death and destruction. Do you see the result of thus insulting the virtuous daughter of Drupad? Perhaps the omen of wrath to come may yet be turned away by an old man's petition.'

Dhrita-rashtra was led slowly to the insulted queen, and in kind tones he said to her, 'Noble queen, beloved daughter, Yudhishthir's loving wife, forgive these insults, cruel and ruthless; turn away from us

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the wrath of heaven. Name your wish and ask for the boon. Let my son's sinful action be forgiven.'

Draupadi was grateful to Dhrita-rashtra and confided in him.

'May every earthly joy be thine for thy mercy! I will ask a boon of thee—that my lord, Yudhishthir, be set free from bondage. His sons must be born of royal rank, not as slaves born of a slave.'

'My daughter,' he said, 'you have your wishes. Name a second boon.'

'Give their freedom to Bhima, Arjun and the twin brothers. Allow them to depart with their chariots and arms. Let them go through the country as free men.'

'That is granted, noble queen,' cried the old king. 'Ask yet another blessing and it shall be given you. In thus fulfilling your wishes I am gaining blessings for my house.'

'Nay,' said the empress, 'I will ask no more. Thou hast been generous, and I, a woman, must be modest and wise. A knight would not ask more than two boons, neither can I. My husband and brothers are now freed from their bonds, and their future depends upon their might and bravery.'

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VIII

PRINCES IN EXILE

Banishment—Vidura's Blessing—Forest Life—A Voice at the Well.

YUDHISHTHIR was now shorn of his empire, far from home, and was obliged to wander homeless with his wife and his brothers. He took leave of the Kurus, giving his blessing to the king and his counsellors. When he spoke to his cousins they hung their heads in shame, but answered nothing.

Vidura was concerned for Pritha.

'Is the queen-mother doomed to wander through the forest? Of gentle birth, unaccustomed to rough life and growing old, Pritha must stay. Let her, beloved by all, dwell with me and await your return.'

The brothers thanked him, accepted his offer and asked him to bless them.

Vidura, turning to Yudhishthir, thus addressed them:

'O pride of Bharat's race, men of righteousness, fortune brings no benefit to a man with guile in his heart, while sorrow is no shame to those of innocent thoughts. Yudhishthir is well practised in laws of duty. Arjun has no match in battle. Bhima has a

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star-protected life. The twins are wise above other men, born to rule a great kingdom. The beautiful, faithful Draupadi shall gain the favour of fate. Each of you has varied gifts, and you shall be bound to one another by love, and, after a fall, you shall rise to win the greatest and mightiest empire.

'It is ordained, Yudhishthir, that this exile must be for your good. It is a trial and severe devotion, appointed to chasten and heal you.

'In your previous pilgrimages Meru taught you the maxims of righteousness. In the forest of Varnavata you learned the love of heaven. And now you are to learn still more and from a purer source. Narada will be your instructor and yourself the happiest of mortals. May you enjoy the help of Indra, mighty conqueror, in your battles, and may Yama enable you to subdue your mind, and Kuvera incline you to care for the poor and hungry. Free your heart from sin and greed. Let your righteousness shine gently as the moon's light. In patience emulate the earth; radiate your good influence like the rays of the sun. May your strength be beyond resistance like a strong wind. However great your sorrow, learn a lesson from it. While you live in exile continue righteously. I trust you will return, safe and happy, and that these old eyes will see you, with every human temptation surmounted, wearing the god-given crown of virtue.'

Vidura then spoke to the brothers, who felt they were gaining strength of purpose from the venerable man. They bowed to him, to Bhishma, Drona and

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all, and left the ancient house of their father to go to the jungles.

Draupadi had bidden farewell to Pritha in the inner room. The mother was inconsolable and fainted from distress as her sons and daughter set out. She was taken by the dames to Vidura's palace, while Dhritarashtra had grave foreboding concerning the result of all these things.

In the journeys through the forests, the Pandavs were at times visited by Krishna, who consoled Draupadi and advised the young men. Draupadi, who had a vigorous mind, often urged Yudhishthir to return and retake his kingdom. In this she was supported by Bhima, but Yudhishthir would not be turned from his promise. They were to walk the forest twelve years, and in the thirteenth were to go disguised, on pain of another twelve years' exile, if they were discovered.

The saint Vyasa visited Yudhishthir, and advised Arjun not to trust only to his own skill, great as that was, but to go and obtain, by penance and worship, other weapons of supernatural effect. The famous archer wandered alone to carry out Vyasa's suggestion, and by his austerities he so far gained the good-will of the gods that Siva, the kindly, gracious and propitious, appeared to him as a human hunter and challenged him to fight. So pleased was the god with Arjun's skill, that he blessed him and gave him celestial weapons.

Arjun had further adventures in the higher regions. Five years he spent in Swarga, the heaven of Indra, from whom he obtained other mystic weapons.

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During that time Arjun fought against the giants who were enemies of Indra, and he slew them in millions.

In the meantime the brothers in the forest mourned his absence, and were comforted by the rishis at whose dwelling-places they halted. These hermits generally told them stories of by-gone ages, concerning people whose sorrow had been turned to joy.

They were not without adventures, however. On one occasion a demon named Jatasura seized them and made them captive, save Bhima. That day Bhima had gone to find golden lotus-flowers on a lake sacred to Kuvera, the god of Wealth; but he returned just in time to see what had happened, and he attacked and slew the fiend, thus liberating his brothers.

Soon afterwards Bhima encountered the servants of the god Kuvera. He was nearing the abode of Kuvera, around which were numberless gems, when the minions tried to drive him away. He slew a large number of them. Kuvera, on discovering what had happened, was very angry, but in the end he said Bhima had only done what was clearly the warrior's duty in such a case.

At the end of five years the Pandavs were delighted to see a huge chariot drive up to them. It was driven by Matali, the charioteer of Indra, and from it alighted Arjun, who proceeded to relate his adventures.

Yudhishthir was curious with respect to the mystic weapons, and asked Arjun to demonstrate their power. Thinking no evil was likely to result, Arjun consented; but the earth and heaven were so

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terribly affected that heavenly beings and sages came at once to the scene and warned him not to use his wonderful implements of war unless necessity compelled him.

It came to the ears of Duryodhan that the Pandavs were in a pitiable plight, and this was to him a source of great joy. He determined to go and see their distress and poverty, for what enjoyment he could derive from the sight. For his protection, however, he was careful to take a strong force, but it proved to be of little use.

He had gone a short way into the forest when he was met by the Gandharvas, celestial musicians, attending Indra. They forbade him to penetrate any further. He refused to heed them, and ordered his army to attack.

This led to his complete discomfiture. He was captured and taken before the king of the Gandharvas. The Pandav brothers were able to render good for the evil Duryodhan intended. Arjun in his travels had become a friend of the Gandharva king, and used his influence to secure his cousin's freedom. Duryodhan, however, could not accept such a service with either grace or gratitude, but it became a new source of hatred in his breast.

The king of the Indus country, then called Sindhu, who was a friend of Duryodhan, was in the forest one day when the five were hunting. Jayadratha happened to see Draupadi alone, and remembering who she was and her circumstances, he halted his car and spoke to her. Presently he began to urge her to leave her husbands and live with him.

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Draupadi scorned the king, who then seized her and bore her to his chariot.

As if the animate things of nature were aware of an outrage, the birds and beasts were unusually disturbed. This did not escape the notice of the hunters, and they turned back to their hut to assure themselves. Draupadi was not to be seen, but by tracing the wheel marks and broken branches the Pandavs followed in the direction taken by Jayadratha.

He was obliged to yield. Bhima, in wrestling with him, threw him down with such force as almost to kill him. Jayadratha saved his life by declaring himself the slave of the Pandavs. They set him free and bade him go back to his own land.

One day Yudhishthir and his brothers went into the Dwaita forest and spent some time with a hermit. He complained that a stag had carried off his firewood, and asked the Pandavs to secure it for him. Seeing the stag, they ran after it, but could not overtake it. When they had lost sight of it they sat, tired out, under a banyan tree. Soon Yudhishthir asked Nakula to fetch some water from a tank.

Nakula went to do so, and in his hurry to quench his thirst he did not hear a voice in the air saying, 'Do not be too bold. Answer my questions before you drink or draw the water.'

Nakula drank and fell dead.

Presently Yudhishthir asked Sahadeva to go and hurry Nakula, who, he thought, was unduly long in bringing the water. Sahadeva was overcome with

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grief at seeing the dead body of his twin-brother, but feeling thirsty, he ran on to the water. The voice spoke as before. Sahadeva did not hear it, but began to drink and fell dead.

Arjun was now sent to find why these two were delaying. When he saw them dead, he fitted his arrows to his bow, but there was no one to aim at. Then came a voice, 'Why do you try to capture the water? First answer some questions; then you may drink and take enough for your needs.'

Arjun was very angry, and replied, 'Who is it that seeks to stop me? I will teach you not to speak to me in this way.'

With this he shot his arrows in all directions as rapidly as possible. No man fell, however, so he turned his attention to the water. He drank and fell dead.

Bhima now came to see what had happened. He was very angry at seeing his three brothers dead, and at first thought of fight.

The voice spoke, and Bhima heard. But he disregarded the warning, drank and fell dead.

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IX

A YEAR OF DISGUISES

Yudhishthir's Sire—Princely Serving-men—The Cattle Raid—A Warrior in Spite of Himself.

YUDHISHTHIR became very anxious and went himself to see into the matter. Near the tank he found the dead bodies of his brothers, and sat down to lament over their fall. In time he, too, went to the brink of the water; and just as he was about to step in, the voice spoke again.

Yudhishthir was not so rash as his brothers had been. He turned his head to discover the speaker, and when no person was visible it occurred to him that perchance it was a god.

'Who is speaking?' he asked.

'I am a Yaksha, one of Kuvera's attendants,' said the voice, 'and it is I who slew your brothers. They paid no heed to my warning, but drank when they were forbidden. And, O king, if you are fond of life, pay no heed to your thirst until you have answered my questions.'

Yudhishthir replied, 'I will obey thy command, O Yaksha: ask and I will answer as I am able.'

'Tell me,' said the invisible being, 'what is the

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cause of the rising and setting of the sun? Who are its attendants and in what is it established?'

'Brahma, the creator, causes the sun to rise, while Dharma, the god of human duty and righteousness, causes the sun to set. The sun is attended by the gods and is established in righteousness.'

'One creature sleeps without closing its eyes; something is born but stirs not in its birth; a third swells by its own force.'

'The first is a fish; the second which stirs not at birth is an egg; the third is a river.'

The Yaksha continued: 'Of mankind, what is his worst enemy, what his chronic disease? Who shall be accounted righteous and who not?'

Yudhishthir replied: 'The greatest enemy of mankind is anger, but his everlasting disease is covetousness. The holy man is he that loves all his fellow-men and seeks their good: the unholy man is the man who never pities.'

The Yaksha asked many other questions ranging over all branches of knowledge, earthly and heavenly, but Yudhishthir was careful, patient and thoughtful, and returned the correct answers. And above all he showed no signs of impatience or anger.

The Yaksha was now satisfied and said, 'In everything you have acted and spoken wisely. Your brothers shall return to life.'

Immediately the four prostrate figures rose. They no longer felt hunger or thirst. Yudhishthir wished to know the name of the speaker, and pleaded to be told. At length the voice answered, 'I am thy father, Dharma, the god of Duty. I have now

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proved thee, my son. Before I depart, ask boons that I may bless thee.'

Yudhishthir obtained several boons, one being that, since he and his brothers had to pass a year in disguise, it might be made impossible for any one to recognise them whatever disguise they adopted.

The brothers were joyful at being again united. Twelve years having passed, the time had now come for them to assume disguises. In their wanderings they had reached the land of Matsya, ruled by King Virata, and they decided to serve in the household of the king.

Yudhishthir, having become a skilled dicer—an art taught him by a Brahman in the forest—offered himself as such, and became a courtier and attended on the king. Bhima became a cook. It was difficult to disguise Arjun. He dressed in shell bangles, ear-rings and braids, and was engaged as a teacher of music and dancing under the name of Brihan-nala. He thus had access to the inner rooms of the palace. Nakula became a groom, and Sahadeva tended the king's cows. Draupadi obtained a position in the household as maid to the princess.

Virata felt that all of them were nearer to kings than ordinary beings, but according to their answers he gave them the positions they sought.

Although the men had chosen such peaceful and humble tasks, it was not possible for their great strength to remain undetected. Bhima, for example, in an athletic contest, so far forgot his part as cook as to wrestle with and overcome a champion.

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Afterwards he fought against wild beasts in the amphitheatre.

It was owing to Bhima that a certain event was hastened. The commander of Virata's army had noticed the beauty of the maid who served the princess, and from time to time asked her to marry him. Draupadi, of course, refused, and in the end the chief commander used violence against her.

This came to the knowledge of the cook, who, without weapons, lay waiting for the soldier, and after a great struggle killed him. However, none of their disguises were penetrated by Duryodhan's agents, who were searching all that year.

Word came to the king of the Trigartas that Virata's commander-in-chief was slain, and he asked Duryodhan to join forces in an attack on Virata. This was quite in keeping with Duryodhan's policy, and it was decided they should steal all Virata's cattle.

The attack was well planned to give the utmost trouble to Virata's forces. The Trigartas advanced on the south-eastern frontier, while Duryodhan entered from the north. This drew Virata to make attack on the Trigartas, and it was Duryodhan's safer task to prey upon the fattened cattle.

Bhishma, Drona and Karna at the head of the Kuru warriors swept the land without much opposition, and captured sixty thousand head of cattle. The chief of the cowherds drove swiftly to the capital, which at that time was empty of soldiers. Dismounting from the chariot by the city gate, he beat his head and breast in anguish, mourning his hard lot. Prince Uttara, a young man of great beauty, who

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had been left behind to rule the land, passed that way, and the cowherd told him of the great cattle raid by the Kurus, and urged him to collect a force and pursue the robbers.

'O pride and hope of the Matsya race,' he cried, 'rescue your father's herds. Your step is quick and elastic, and your valour is well known. Let your power for vengeance also be seen. Your sire is leading against the hosts of Trigarta; and we look to you to fill his place in the north.

'Rise Uttara! pursue the Kurus. Bring back the herds. Break the Kuru's line, as an elephant tramples the jungle grass. Let your bow and arrows sing of death and your might, like the lyre speaking sweet music under the touch of the skilful player. Hasten! Harness your white battle-chargers, and drive your car like Indra, who wields the thunder.

'Arjun is the hope and stay of the Kurus; so you, under your lion banner, are the hope of the Matsya kingdom and our pride!'

Uttara, easy-going, did not stir to save his land from the spoilers. He stood by the palace gate and answered.

'Yes, I do know something about the use of the bow and the dart. I am not entirely ignorant of the warrior's duty or unskilled in its performance. I would recover my father's cattle from those despicable, greedy robbers, if there was any charioteer clever enough to compel my horses. In my last fight, after twenty-eight days, my driver was killed. Bring me a worthy successor to him, and I will unfurl my golden banner and rush off to give battle.

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'I will break their ranks of men, horses and elephants; I will win back the herd from the field of battle. As Indra slew the sons of Danu, I will slay the chiefs of Kuru and drive them back to their native strongholds. Yes, Bhishma, Duryodhan, proud as he is, and Karna, the peerless archer, and Drona too, shall tremble in shame before me. These warriors have stolen the cattle of Matsya when I was not there to save them, but from my arrows they shall feel the weight of the Matsya vengeance.

'Bring to me a chariot-driver and let him drive my car, and the enemy will say among themselves, "Is this the war-famed Arjun?"'

All this harangue was heard by Arjun, who was Brihan-nala, the eunuch dancing-master, and he sorely longed to put Uttara's words to the test. Brihan-nala asked Draupadi to speak for him. 'Say that Brihan-nala will drive the chariot, and that Brihan-nala was formerly driver to Arjun, and therefore has taken part in many battles. Tell him I will bring his cattle home.'

Draupadi, as a menial, approached Uttara and said, 'Attend to my words, prince. There is Brihan-nala, who will drive your chariot. He used to be Arjun's charioteer, and has won many a great fight with his late master, who trained him in war. When Arjun defeated Khandav, Brihan-nala drove his chariot. I saw this, because at that time I was maid to Yudhishthir's queen.'

Uttara was not at all convinced.

'I can quite believe you, handsome maid. But

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Brihan-nala is really not worth calling a man: how can I ask such a person to draw the rein of a war-horse?'

'There is no need to persuade Brihan-nala to undertake this great task. He is eager to do it. If you do not wish to give your orders to him, let your sister, whom he serves.'

The princess came forward and gave orders to Arjun who then led the hesitating prince into the battle. Arjun lashed the chargers and drove the timid but boastful prince at a rapid rate out of the town. Almost before Uttara had regained his breath, Arjun halted by a thick grove of trees, and turning to the prince, he said, 'Prince, your bow and arrows are pretty little toys. No warrior would be seen with such a useless and unpleasing set. Look below that tree, however, and you will see a warrior's bow and arrows, martial banners, swords and coats of mail. Mark my words, a bow is there which can scarcely be bent by the strongest warriors in the whole of the battle. When that bow is bent the boundaries of the country extend. It is like a palm-tree, so tall and slender; made of smooth wood with toughened fibres; and its ends are of gold. It is a bow worthy of a warrior.'

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X

SORROW AND JOY

The Pandav Weapons—Drona recognises Arjun—Cattle rescued—Abhimanyu marries.

UTTARA was now mystified and frightened, and found another excuse. The glade to which Arjun had driven was excessively dark, and the leafy tree to which he led the prince seemed to be hung about with several corpses. Uttara replied, 'In this glade are many corpses that must have lain in their wrapping for months. I can see them hanging in the open air. They are unclean objects which I dare not touch.'

'Do not fear, prince,' said Arjun. 'I tell you, there are no dead in the tree. What you take for corpses are cases of weapons that were hidden for a certain purpose. I do not ask you to touch an unclean thing, but to bring the armour and weapons of a warrior.'

Thus assured, while Arjun held the reins, Uttara dismounted and climbed the tree. Arjun told him to open the cases. Uttara cut the bands, and suddenly the shining bows appeared. For a moment Uttara regarded them without a word; in the dark-

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ness of the glade they shone like stars, and the bows were so curiously twisted that already they seemed to be hissing like the striking serpent. The prince, trembling, cried to Arjun :

'Whose tall and stately bow is this, my gentle friend? The bosses are made of gold, and the ends are tipped with gold.

'Whose is this weapon so stout and strong? It has elephants of burnished gold worked upon the staff.

'This other bow must belong to a mighty monarch ; it has golden insects worked in the ebony. Here is yet another, with glistening suns of gold making it lustrous. And a fifth is set with costly jewels, and the light is glinted from its golden fire-flies.'

Uttara passed on to the arrows, which equally caused him to marvel: as before, he found five varieties. A thousand were cased in gold. Next to them were a large number of iron-headed arrows, finely sharpened and feathered with the golden yellow feathers of vultures. One of the quivers was decorated with a golden-tiger on a black ground, and the arrows contained were boar-eared in shape. A fourth quiver held seven hundred arrows, with a crescent-shaped blade that seemed thirsting for their victims' blood. The remaining arrows were made of steel, finely tempered and golden-crested and winged with parrot feathers.

Coming next to the swords, Uttara examined them. One was a marvellous sabre engraved with a toad on the hilt and blade ; the scabbard was beautifully

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gilded. Another, much larger and heavier, reposed in a sheath of tiger skin. The haft of this one was decorated with bells and the pommel mounted with gold. The third, Uttara thought, was an example of very fine work by the aboriginal races of that portion of India. It was a bright scimitar with a simple scabbard of cowhide. The next weapon was a long sword which shone, although it was black; its sheath was of goat-skin, gold worked on a blue ground. Perhaps the last was the most marvellous; it was both broad and heavy, and more than thirty fingers long; its sheath, as well as its decoration, was of gold, glistening like a tongue of fire.

Arjun was proud of these weapons; and when Uttara had exhausted the tale of what he had found, the charioteer told the prince to whom they belonged. The gold-embossed bow was Arjun's gift from heaven; that with elephants worked on it, Bhima's; the golden insects graced Yudhishthir's; Nakula's bow had the golden suns, and the jewelled bow belonged to Sahadeva.

'These thousand arrows,' said the charioteer, 'are Arjun's, while the crescent-bladed darts belong to Bhima. The tiger-skin quiver holds Nakula's boar-ear shafts. Parrot feathers mark Sahadeva's arrows. This set of three-knotted arrows tipped with gold and feathered with wings of vultures belongs to King Yudhishthir.'

Uttara pondered all the charioteer had said, and looked at the swords. His companion therefore continued: 'If you would know of the swords,

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prince, no one but the tiger-waisted Bhima can wield a sword of such length and weight as that. The toad-engraved steel is Arjun's, and is much dreaded by all his foes. The golden-hilted sabre with the black-and-gold embossed blade was saved by King Yudhishthir when he forfeited his kingdom. That sword in the goat-skin scabbard is young Nakula's, while the scimitar is Sahadeva's.'

Uttara no longer felt like boasting. 'These are strange words,' he said, 'and these weapons are stranger still. The arms of the sons of Pandu, far-famed for might! Where are those princes now, the warlike Arjun, good Yudhishthir, tiger-waisted Bhima and the war-skilled twins? Their empire was lost over a game of dice and we have heard nothing more of them since. Perhaps they are pilgrims in a distant land. What has become of the noble Queen Draupadi, the best and holiest of women? Is she still wandering with Yudhishthir, constant in her mind and heart?'

With a smile in his eyes Arjun proudly answered: 'The brothers do not wander in a lonely and distant land. In your father's court Yudhishthir lives disguised; in the palace, too, lives Bhima, day by day preparing the food. Nakula guards the royal chargers, while Sahadeva herds the cows. Your sister's waiting-woman is Draupadi. And, prince—forgive my wearing the dancing master's shell-rings and other unmanly apparel—I am not a creature of scorn, as being neither a man nor a woman. Your eyes now rest upon Arjun!'

Taking off the despised ornaments for ever,

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Arjun then abandoned his disguise, and proceeded to arm himself.

Soon afterwards the car of Uttara was seen dashing across the plains bearing Arjun's banner. The Kurus were amazed to find themselves fighting against Arjun. The more practised warriors knew that the deep-sounding twang was that of the marvellous bow, Gandiva, which Agni had given to the hero. Preceptor Drona, among the captains of Kuru, could not forbear to speak of Arjun's sudden appearance.

'Behold there the monkey-standard of Arjun. Many a time that banner has greeted these old eyes. All the Kurus know that ensign as they would a comet crossing the sky. Do you not hear the deep voice of Gandiva? Its note strikes my ear like a greeting. Mark these arrows falling prone before me. It is Arjun's greeting to his old preceptor, now his years of exile are done. There he comes into sight! His face and features can now be discerned, with their pride and brightness as of old. In his gleaming armour he shines like the fire of a holy sacrifice!'

Arjun saw the Kuru warriors arming, and gave Uttara the following instructions as to driving the chariot: 'Hold your steeds, Prince, for we are already within the range of my arrows. Drive where you see Duryodhan. I am not concerned to-day with any of the other warriors. If we slay the monarch, the rest will go home. I can see Drona, Bhishma, Kripa and Karna there, but turn your chariot aside. I must find Duryodhan, and probably he will be far

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from the line of danger, guarding the cattle while these warriors are defending his retreat.'

Accordingly Uttara checked and turned the horses, wheeled the chariot along the line, and drove furiously past the flank of the Kuru army in the pursuit of Duryodhan.

Kripa noticed the action and guessed its significance. 'See, chiefs,' he cried, 'the gallant Arjun wheels his chariot out of the fight, and there is no doubt he intends to meet and slay Duryodhan. We must direct our force upon him at once to save our king, for except Indra alone, there is no one able to stay Arjun. What does the gain of Matsya cattle count, should they be thousands, if we lose our king?'

But Kripa's words were not heeded. Arjun's chariot made unhindered progress. His arrows fell thick and fast whenever the Kurus were closely formed, until the soldiers neither shot nor fled but stood, panic-stricken, gazing first at Arjun and then upon their dying comrades.

First the sound of Arjun's conch-shell, then the accent of his bow, and all the while the thunder rumble of his car: the Kuru soldiers fled or slept with the dead.

So he came to the herd of cattle and rounded them up. Lifting their tails, they fled in a stampede, straight to Matsya's well-known pastures.

King Virata returned from the southern expedition, and was proud of the way his son had dealt with the cattle-raid. Uttara had no wish to take to

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himself the credit due to Arjun, and so, in agreement with a promise of secrecy he had made to the prince, he said that his success was due to the intervention of a god who would remain invisible until the appointed time. Presently the Pandav brothers came before Virata, wearing their royal armour. Virata greeted them, and offered to Arjun the princess of Matsya.

Arjun replied, 'Pardon me, sire, I may not take the beautiful princess of Matsya to be my bride. I have long regarded her with the pride almost of a father. In my year of disguise I have taught her the steps of the dance, and have watched the increase of her beauty and grace. Grant her, I pray you, to my son, Abhimanyu, who is trained to arms and of a god-like demeanour. His mother, Subhadra, is Krishna's sister, and he is noble and good and worthy in every way.'

Virata heard these words with the greatest pleasure. 'Those are the words of a man truly noble. Be it as you say, Arjun. The line of Matsya kings is honoured by an alliance with that of Pandu.'

The wedding was announced, and mighty kings came to the sacrifice. Krishna and Subhadra were there. Many costly presents were given, Virata, among other things, bestowing upon Abhimanyu two hundred elephants and seven thousand horses.

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XI

COUNCILS

Krishna's Speech—Satyaki seeks War—Krishna's Offer to Arjun and Duryodhan—Efforts for Peace.

TWELVE years of exile had now sped, and during the thirteenth the disguises of the Pandavs had not been penetrated; accordingly Yudhishthir sent to Duryodhan demanding that the kingdom of Indra-prastha be given back to him. Dhrita-rashtra and his queen urged that this request should be granted, but Duryodhan was jealous as before, and his hatred had not grown less in their absence.

Yudhishthir obtained no satisfaction in reply to his messages: things took a very grave turn, and there were preparations for war.

Meanwhile, Abhimanyu's wedding feast was proceeding with all the gaiety of the occasion, but some of the chiefs there assembled were in serious conversation.

At dawn next day, just as the golden clouds shone over the jewelled panels of the walls and tinted the festoons, the chieftains made their way to Virata's Council Chamber. Virata, Drupad of Panchala,

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Krishna and his brother, Valadeva, took the highest seats. By them were placed Satyaki and the Pandavs. The remainder of the hall was filled with the sons of chiefs and warriors, making a brilliant assembly.

For a time kindly greetings and every-day conversation passed, until Krishna rose. Every eye was upon him, and wise words were expected.

'You are all aware,' he began, 'that Yudhishthir, by staying in the forest twelve years and remaining concealed the thirteenth, has fulfilled his promise. He has performed his part in the face of shame and affliction. He now asks the monarchs here what his duty calls upon him to do. Yudhishthir would not deviate from the path of duty if by doing so, he could gain a kingdom in the sky. He would rather live in a hamlet than rule an empire, if kingship meant that he should sin. When he lost his wealth, his kingdom and glory, the loss only served to discover more virtue in him. At the present crisis he is more willing to keep peace than to pursue anger.

'Now think of Duryodhan, who has, since childhood, pursued the Pandav brothers with hatred, and sought their disgrace and even destruction by fire, poison or tricks of dice. Think of these matters, wise sovereigns, with calmness, and help Yudhishthir with your counsel and your blessings.

'There are not many courses which a warrior can adopt in these circumstances. Yudhishthir may openly declare war and use all the aid his friends can give him. He may swiftly and suddenly descend

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upon his wily foes. On the other hand, he may send a letter to Duryodhan and ask what his purpose is. And, again, he may entrust some honoured ambassador with a letter to the usurper, giving greetings and asking for the restoration of his kingdom.'

Krishna still had hopes that the matter would be settled peaceably.

The first to reply was Valadeva, Krishna's elder brother.

'You have heard my brother's words; he loves both Yudhishthir and the lord of Hastina-pura. It is true that the two princes may yet again rule their neighbouring kingdoms in peace. Let us send an envoy speedily to Hastina with our love and greetings; let him deliver Yudhishthir's wishes and learn Duryodhan's attitude. He will do obeisance to the old chieftains and to the Kuru brethren. It would not be wise for him to make bold demands. Duryodhan in this instance is the man in power. It would be folly for Yudhishthir to show anger. He was asked by all his friends not to gamble, but in a reckless moment he did so, losing his empire, and now Duryodhan looks upon Indra-prastha as his own. Let Yudhishthir ask for his empire in a humble spirit. I do not advise war. Try to get Duryodhan to give up his rule. War cannot restore a gambler's losses.'

Satyaki rose and replied to Valadeva: 'It is a shameful thing thus to plead for Duryodhan in our council of war. It often happens that in a soldierly family there is one who bends the knee. Valadeva to speak so timidly must have a woman's heart. I

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wonder how you, Valadeva, could throw such aspersions upon Yudhishthir. As to the dicing, Yudhishthir was challenged, and he was unfortunate: moreover, he trusted the challengers. Since when has it been the custom for a monarch to decline the challenge of another monarch? Yudhisthir kept his word. He gave up the empire; he lived in the jungle; and now he claims his former kingdom, not as a suppliant but as what he is—a king— and the haughty Duryodhan must give it up. No doubt, urging Duryodhan to the right action are Bhishma, Drona and Kripa, but you do not expect that what Duryodhan has gained by fraud he will ever give up as being Yudhishthir's by right!

'I vote for war, fully declared. Let it be relentless. We shall carry no grace as we course in our cars across the battle-plains. Not to words but to weapons will the Kurus yield. They shall restore Yudhishthir his kingdom or perish. Duryodhan and his hosts shall fall before our shock, as the rock is riven in the thunder.

'Who shall withstand helmet-wearing Arjun? Or the discus of Krishna? Who dare meet the valiant twins led by Bhima? And my own bow and arrows inspire dread. Drupad, old as he is, has no peer with his weapon. Abhimanyu, son of Arjun and Subhadra, whose wedding feast we are here to celebrate, will lead with more than Arjun's skill.

'We shall conquer the guileful sons of Dhritarashtra; we shall defeat Karna, even though his deeds are known the world over. Thus we shall put Yudhishthir on his throne.

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'It is no sin, to my mind, to slaughter the foe, but to ask a favour of an enemy is both a sin and a distress. Hasten, therefore, to our duty: our foemen must yield.'

Next Drupad, the aged king of Panchala, rose and told his thoughts.

'I rather think you are right. The Kuru race is very stubborn. It is a fruitless task to sue Duryodhan for a gracious act. Dhrita-rashtra will have but little influence, his star already wanes. Bhishma and Drona, mighty and righteous as they are, will be unable to avoid this war.

'On the other side are Karna, thirsting for blood, and Sakuni, full of guile, urging Duryodhan forward on the warlike path he is eager to tread.

'Valadeva's advice is vain; our ambassador, if we sent one, would go on a fool's errand. Duryodhan would not give up a half of his empire. He takes our mildness for fear, and if we ask anything of him it will only swell his pride.

'Therefore send out our heralds into every land to find allies. Send in all directions to every warlike nation. In the meantime let us offer Duryodhan our friendship. I will even send my priest to speak fair to him; and if he relinquishes his hold on Indra-prastha, he will enjoy the things of peace; otherwise, our armies with resounding tread will shake the land.'

Drupad's proposal found favour with the assembly. Krishna and Valadeva returned to Dwarka, as they had no wish to be implicated in the trouble. While matters were pending, however,

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Arjun and Duryodhan each went to consult Krishna at Dwarka. Krishna offered them both his help, and gave them the choice, in the event of war being declared, of either a great army or his advice in the course of the war. Duryodhan chose the army, but Arjun chose the help of Krishna.

The ambassador from Drupad to Dhrita-rashtra carried the message of peace, but in vain. Equally vain was it that the elders of the Kuru land counselled patience and the cessation of the feud. Duryodhan would not allow the Pandavs to rule their country; and the Pandavs were men of sufficient spirit not to surrender.

Dhrita-rashtra sent his charioteer, Sanjaya, as ambassador to the Pandavs. He spoke of the forces of the Kurus, and said that no human triumphs were long-lived.

To this Yudhishthir replied that Arjun's might could never be surpassed, and that it was the duty of the Kshatra to fight. He again asked the advice of Krishna, who gave him a memorable answer.

'It is good to keep peace, yet it is not the part of a warrior to avoid fighting.'

Yudhishthir's reply to Sanjaya was that the Pandavs would be content, if only a small portion of their land were given to them.

Sanjaya returned. Duryodhan, however, was stubborn. His mother, Gandhari, being troubled on account of her son, foretold his disgrace and defeat by Bhima. But still Duryodhan was intent on war.

The Pandavs next asked Krishna to go in person

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to Hastinapon their behalf. Krishna did so, feeling that if Duryodhan still spurned peace, he would surely deserve destruction.

It seemed as if a dreadful war was ordained by the gods. Krishna, to avert the disaster, prayed for divine assistance in the mission, and went to the palace of Hastina to intercept the warlike council. Arriving at the palace, he found in progress a council of war similar to that which he had left. In a voice like rolling thunder Krishna addressed the assembly.

'Mighty Dhrita-rashtra, forbid this war of friends and kinsmen, for I bring a message of peace and love. Of all the nations of the world the Bharats are most excellent. The elders of the Kurus are far-famed for wisdom, virtue and kindness. Ill would it be for the father of his people to sully his name by a sin or a lie.

'Dhrita-rashtra, thy sons gave way to unholy anger, and have done their kinsmen wrong in refusing them the throne and country which is rightly theirs. And here a plague rises and sweeps the earth as the comet fires the sky—before long a civil war will break out. This pride will feed itself on the wholesale deaths of friends and relatives; whole nations will bleed to death in the war that is now upon us. If you love your ancient race, Dhrita-rashtra, now stretch out your restraining hands over your restless sons. Even yet it is not too late, for they will obey you. And I will constrain the sons of Pandu into the ways of peace.

'It is to your good that this family quarrel should cease, that the brave Duryodhan and the

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pious Yudhishthir should rule the sister countries. Think how glorious the two kingdoms would stand, if at peace. The sons of Pandu are brave men, their armed hands are strong. Were they to guard the Kuru land, not even Indra himself could shake it.

'Bhishma is like a wall of protection, the mighty Drona is a redoubtable leader, Karna still an unmatched archer; there is none equal to Kripa. But if by these stand tiger-waisted Bhima, good Yudhishthir and helmet-wearing Arjun, the Kuru land will be paramount throughout the wide world, and you will be the mightiest king. Round you will stand your sons and grandsons, kinsmen and friends, and a race of heroes will arise. All these and the distant nations will own your sway and work your will.'

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XII

THIRST FOR WAR

Krishna at Hastina—Vidura's Speech—Duryodhan's Fiery Language—Karna Obstinate.

'If, on the other hand,' Krishna continued, 'peace is spurned and everyone has the passion of war in his heart, soon these ancient walls will re-echo the wails of mourners.

'Suppose, O Dhrita-rashtra,' said Krishna before the assembly, 'that Pandu's sons are slain. Is that of any comfort to you? They are dear to you. But to me it seems that it is not Pandu's sons whose deaths will be the curse of this war. Your princes will be found on the blood-soaked plain, I fear. It rests with you, remember, king. At this moment many kings draw nigh to meet their fates. It wants but the word from you, and all these men met for warfare will join, instead, at the festive board. They will forsake their armour and deck themselves with wreaths and garlands; and in drinking the wine of friendship, will bless your honoured name.'

Krishna paused, but, no one answering, he continued:

'Reflect, man of many winters. When the right-

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eous Pandu left his throne you took his five orphans. It was your hand that taught them to take their infant steps, and from your lips they learned to speak. They grew up in your bosom, and ever they remain dear to you. Take them back into your bosom, and be a father to them once more.

'They send homage and charge me to deliver a message. "Tell our king, who has been to us more than a father, that, obedient to his command, we have stayed in the deep forest and journeyed into many countries. We always knew Duryodhan would be true to the promise. Now the years of toil, distress, woe, trouble, waiting, watching and danger are over. We have lived like men forlorn in the night, but at last the end has come and the radiant dawn awakes. Be to us even yet a father, though not led by anger, and, like a preceptor, show us the true path. Should we be frail, strengthen us, and if we faint, help us."'

Krishna then related the misfortunes of the Pandavs, and made a final effort for peace.

'Believe me, Dhrita-rashtra, and all attendant lords, Krishna is pleading for peace, and prays for blessings upon all of you. Do not lead your nations forth to slaughter, and slay not your kinsmen. Let your closing years, O King, be free from blood and sin. Pandu's sons should stand with your own at the arms of your royal chair. Keep peace and virtue, for you have not many years on earth.'

As Krishna ceased, Dhrita-rashtra sighed heavily, and wiped his eyes.

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The old warrior Bhishma then spoke to Duryodhan, urging peace. 'Take Krishna's advice,' he said, 'for he thinks only of your welfare. Grant the demand of the Pandavs, and you will save the lives of your friends and family and your subjects. Your nation is the foremost in the world. Do not bring upon them dire destruction by a selfish, sinful act. Pay heed to Krishna and Vidura: listen to the words of your father and your mother. Leave the dark paths you have trodden, and turn to the light of grace.'

All this time Duryodhan's anger was mounting.

Drona's speech was brief, and his words such as befitted an old nobleman, who in his day had trained many princes and capable warriors. 'You have heard the advice of Krishna and the warning of Bhishma, men who have no equal either in counsel or war. They are your true friends, Duryodhan. Follow their advice, and rivet the love of your kinsmen by setting up their hopes, and the influence of the Kuru monarchy will always increase.

'Listen to the words of your old preceptor. Your star is fickle, and they who urge you to warfare are not your truest friends. It will be in vain for monarchs to fight for you: your brothers and relatives will support you till they fall, but to no purpose. You cannot win. Krishna is the conqueror, and Arjun. Hear me: these are living words. I trained Arjun. I have seen him bend his bow, charge the enemy, pursue them. There is not his equal among earthly warriors. Krishna,

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from far Dwarka, too, is resistless. These are foes, believe my judgment, you cannot conquer. Follow your own heart in the matter, for you are Kuru's king.'

Vidura next spoke, but in gentle tones, and with a thoughtful look. His words were like a sweet, sad dirge.

'It is not for you I grieve, Duryodhan, although vengeance will overtake you; it is for your father and mother. Their sons, grandsons, friends all perished in the war, themselves without a home or comfort, they shall tread the inhospitable earth. Where should they turn for shelter? Helpless as the bird stripped of its plumage, they will linger for a time and fade away. But ere doing so, Duryodhan, they will curse the day that saw you born.'

Dhrita-rashtra, the venerable king, shook with anguish as he spoke, and the tear-drops filled his sightless orbs.

'Pay heed, beloved son, Duryodhan, have done with this wicked strife. Do not cast the black shadow of death and sorrow on the last years of your aged parents. Krishna's heart is single: his counsel is wise: if you follow his words, you may gain an empire as wide as the world. Yudhishthir is favoured by the gods: seek to be a friend of his: let the Kurus and the Pandavs be at last united in bonds of love. Never may you have so good an opportunity to make a lasting peace. Use it now, for repentance that comes too late is vain. Krishna advises peace, and that is what he came to offer. Take it, Duryodhan, as a prize, and put an end to all strife.'

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The dark-browed Duryodhan sat a moment, sinister and silent. Then angrily he arose and answered the speakers, his eyes flashing anger at Krishna.

'It does not behove you, Chief of Dwarka, to walk in paths of sin and double-dealing, hating me and secretly loving the Pandavs. My father, Bhishma, Vidura and Drona seem to have compacted with you in your hate, and they give me cold glances. What have I done wrong, what terrible calamity is preparing for me that you have singled me out to be thus hated? Tell me, of what unknown sin am I guilty that alienates your good will and the father's love I have till now enjoyed?'

Thus he found excuse by blaming his advisers for a fault he imputed to them.

'If Yudhishthir was fond of gambling and played foolishly, and madly lost his empire and freedom, am I to blame?' he asked. 'Again he was freed, and foolishly played again. He lost his freedom, and was condemned to wander in the forest: what is his complaint?

'What friends have the Pandavs? They have neither friends nor hosts. Why then will they measure themselves against us? Shall we, who scarcely render the due homage to Indra, bow the knee to the homeless Pandavs and their handful of friends? Shall we bow to them while we have Drona to lead our armies, and Bhishma, bright as a god, and archer Karna on our side? Should we play the battle-game and lose it, what matter? Heaven's doors of gold will open for the warrior who meets his death in battle.

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'If undefeated we should fall on the plain, the arrows will not sting us and death will be pleasant. What did the ancient sage say of the Kshatra? The Kshatra is not afraid of his enemy in the fight, he breaks like hardened timber, does not bend and cannot yield: unto no one, except priest and preceptor, will he bend his head.

'Indraprastha, which in a weak moment my father gave to Yudhishthir, will never be his again while I and my brothers are alive. Dhrita-rashtra shall continue to rule one undivided kingdom. On those conditions we will sheathe our sword in friendship. Whereas in days gone by the monarchy was unwisely split in two, it is now united and shall never be divided again.

'That, then, is my answer. Its words are plain. The sons of Pandu ask in vain for any portion of the Kuru empire. So help me, righteous gods in heaven, they shall have neither town nor village, mart nor hamlet, no, not so much as a needle point would cover!'

So saying, Duryodhan haughtily left the Council Chamber, really to devise some means of way-laying Krishna. The holy one condescended to show his true form to those who remained in the hall, and they immediately worshipped him. He then left the palace and, privately meeting Karna, sought to draw him to the side of the Pandavs.

By this time Karna knew that Pritha, the mother of three of the five sons, was his mother also; but he declared that as a youth he had been disowned by her, and that the charioteer, Sutya, and his wife,

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who had brought him up, were subjects of the Kurus, and therefore he was bound in loyalty to support them.

After this Krishna returned to the Pandavs.

Pritha herself sought Karna. She went about the time of his devotions, and met him by the river, and tried to dissuade him from fighting against his half-brothers. But he answered her much as he answered Krishna. He would not forgive the distracted mother for disowning him in those early days. One thing Karna promised, however: he would not fight to the death with any of the Pandavs except Arjun; and mother and son embraced and said farewell.

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XIII

THE HOLY SONG

Krishna Expounds the Law of Duty for Man's Guidance.

THERE was no longer any possibility of peace, so preparations began for a conflict which involved all the nations of the north of India.

Duryodhan's army was great beyond any account. Besides his own division, there were ten belonging to that number of allied sovereigns. The hosts of Yudhishthir amounted to seven such divisions. His chief supporters were Drupad, with the forces of Panchala, and Virata, the king of the Matsya country, who was now a relative of Arjun. Krishna acted as adviser to the Pandavs, according to the arrangement the combatants had agreed on.

The preparations were being made, when Vyasa, the grandfather of both Pandavs and Kurus, came to Dhrita-rashtra and offered to restore his sight during the battle. The aged king, however, refused the boon, and replied, 'Sight is a curse when it is used to behold the slaughter of kinsmen.'

Vyasa then gave Sanjaya a boon, namely, that he should be able to press anywhere in the battle

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without fear of wounds, and that he should see everything that took place whether by day or night. As Sanjaya was the charioteer of Dhrita-rashtra, the boon would enable the king to be kept immediately informed of all that happened.

Bhishma then shouted with a voice like the roar of a lion, and blew his shell to raise the spirits of the Kuru chief, Duryodhan, who, while fully aware of the prowess of his enemies, did not underrate that of his own side. Instantly numberless shells and other instruments were sounded, and the noise was deafening.

At this time Krishna and Arjun were standing in a splendid chariot drawn by white horses. They too sounded their shells, which were of celestial form. Bhima, of dreadful deeds, blew his capacious shell. Yudhishthir and the other princes and allied kings blew theirs also; so that their shrill-sounding voices pierced the hearts of the Kurus and re-echoed with a dreadful noise from heaven to earth.

In the meantime Arjun, perceiving that the sons of Dhrita-rashtra stood ready to begin the fight, and that missiles began to fly abroad, took up his bow and addressed Krishna in the following words :

'I pray thee, Krishna, cause my chariot to be driven and placed between the two armies, that I may behold who are the men that stand ready, anxious to begin the bloody conflict; and with whom it is that I am to fight in this ready field; and who they are that are here assembled to support the vindictive son of Dhrita-rashtra in the battle.'

Krishna, being thus addressed by Arjun, drove the

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chariot to the midst of the space in front of the two armies. Arjun beheld on either side none but grandsires, uncles, cousins, tutors, sons and brothers; and he was seized with extreme pity and compunction, and uttered his sorrow in the following words:

'Having beheld, O Krishna, my kindred thus standing anxious for the fight, my members fail me, my countenance withereth, the hair standeth on end upon my body, and all my frame trembleth with horror! Even Gandiva, my bow, escapeth from my hand, and my skin is parched and dried up. I am not able to stand; for my understanding as it were turneth round, and I behold inauspicious omens on all sides.

'When I shall have destroyed my kindred, shall I any longer look for happiness? I wish not for victory, Krishna; I want not dominion. Although they would kill me, I wish not to fight them; no, not even for the dominion of the three regions of the universe, much less for this little earth! Having killed the sons of Dhrita-rashtra, what pleasure, O Krishna, can we enjoy? Should we destroy them, tyrants as they are, sin would take refuge with us. How, O Krishna, can we be happy hereafter when we have been murderers of our race?

'In the destruction of a family, the ancient virtue of the family is lost. Upon the loss of virtue, vice and impiety overwhelm the whole of a race; and its forefathers, being deprived of the ceremonies of cakes and water offered to their spirits, sink into the infernal regions. By the crimes of those who murder their own relations, the family virtue, and

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the virtue of a whole tribe is for ever done away, and we have been told, O Krishna, that the habitations of those mortals whose generation hath lost its virtue shall be in hell. Woe is me! What a great crime are we prepared to commit! I would rather patiently suffer that the sons of Dhrita-rashtra, with their weapons in their hands, should come upon me, and, unopposed, kill me unguarded in the field.'

When Arjun had ceased to speak, he sat down in the chariot between the two armies and put away his bow and arrows, his heart overwhelmed with affliction.

Krishna, beholding him thus influenced by compunction, his eyes overflowing with a flood of tears, and his heart oppressed with deep affliction, addressed him in the following words:

'Whence, O Arjun, cometh unto thee this folly and unmanly weakness? It is disgraceful, contrary to duty, and is the foundation of dishonour. Yield not thus to unmanliness, for it ill becometh one like thee. Abandon this despicable weakness of thy heart, and stand up.'

And Arjun said, 'Tell me truly what may be best for me to do. I am thy disciple.'

Having thus spoken to Krishna and declared that he would not fight, he was silent. With a smile, Krishna answered the afflicted prince standing in the midst of two armies.

'Arjun, thou grievest for those who are unworthy to be lamented. The wise neither grieve for the dead nor for the living. I myself never *was not*, nor thou, nor all the princes of the earth, nor shall

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we ever hereafter cease *to be*. The man who believeth that it is the soul which killeth, and he who thinketh the soul may be destroyed, are both alike deceived ; for it neither killeth nor is it killed. The weapon divideth it not, the fire burneth it not, the water corrupteth it not, the wind drieth it not away. It is eternal ; therefore, believing it to be thus, thou shouldst not grieve.

'A soldier of thy caste hath no duty superior to fighting. Just to thy wish the door of heaven is found open before thee. Those soldiers only who are the favourites of Heaven obtain such a glorious fight as this. But if thou wilt not perform the duty of thy calling, and fight out the field, thou wilt abandon thy duty and thy honour and be guilty of a crime. A very small portion of his duty delivereth a man from fear.

'Be not one whose motive for action is the hope of reward. Let not thy life be spent in inaction. Depend upon application, perform thy duty, abandon all thoughts of the consequence, whether it terminate in good or evil.

'The natural duties of thy rank are bravery, glory, fortitude, rectitude, not to flee from the field, generosity and princely conduct.

'The man who maketh an offering of his own works to that Being from whom the principles of all beings proceed, and by whom the whole universe was spread forth, by that means obtaineth perfection.

'The duties of a man's own particular calling, although not free from faults, are far preferable to the duty of another, let it be ever so well pursued.

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'A man, by following the duties which are appointed by his birth, doeth no wrong.

'Is thy difficulty now removed, O Arjun, by my words?'

'By thy divine favour,' replied Arjun, 'my confusion of mind is lost, and I have found understanding. I am now fixed in my principles, and am freed from all doubt; and I will henceforth act according to thy words.'

This conversation was heard by Sanjaya and repeated to Dhrita-rashtra, and is known as the Holy Song. It is one of the scriptures of India.

While this conversation was passing between Kishna and Arjun, Yudhishthir had not been neglectful of his duties to his elders. At the time that the preparations were being completed, he advanced to the Kuru lines, and did reverence to Bhishma and Drona. This dutiful conduct caused hundreds of his enemies to admire him, and Bhishma said that his reverence and duty had made his victory sure.

The crimson dawn approached and the nations were all prepared for the deadly combat. And now in every quarter noise was heard: the drums beat, the trumpets shrilled, the sankhas gave out their sonorous voices, all repeated by the clouds and hills until the ground and tents shook. With these were mingled the screams of arrows, the neighing of the chargers and the roar of the cars as they dashed along in obedience to their masters, seeking valiant foemen.

Bhishma, the commander-in-chief of Duryodhan's

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army, was leading and dealing destruction like the very flail of Death itself. He was attacked by the helmet-wearing Arjun, holding his bow. The king of Kosala attracted Abhimanyu, who succeeded in tearing down the Kosala standard, although the king escaped from the fiery young man. Bhima sought one foeman: he strove with Duryodhan. The wicked Duh-sasan was marked by Nakula. Yudhishthir engaged Salya, who as usual was mounted in his car. Drona charged the Panchalas, reviving the old feud with a fierce hatred. Virata, the king of Matsya, fought against Duryodhan's eastern allies, while Kripa and Drona's son met the Kaikayas, a race from the north-west. Drupad turned his host towards Jayadratha.

Many other nations were in the conflict which began on that rosy dawn. No one can tell the numbers of the slain. Sons did not know fathers, and brother slew brother in the fight. Here a horse fell, there the pole of a chariot snapped; elephants were goaded to madness till they charged each other with the shock of moving hills. So began the fight of Kurukshetra that devastated northern India.

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XIV

KURUKSHETRA FIGHT BEGINS

Bhishma routs the Pandavs—Panic of the Kurus—Bhima in Danger—Pandavs routed.

HORSEMEN rushed with the speed of lightning, foot-soldiers stood their ground well; shining armour, pikes and axes, maces, swords and lances flashed everywhere, and over all were thousands of arrows which gleamed white like falling hail.

Bhishma did great execution on the Pandav army. His course could not be stopped. His palm-tree standard was passing through the Pandav ranks when Abhimanyu, the son of Arjun, turned his brown-horsed chariot to obstruct Bhishma. The youth fought well and aimed perfectly; he succeeded in cutting away the palm-tree standard. Bhishma concentrated all his skill on the intrepid young warrior, and pierced him with several arrows, so that he fell.

To save Abhimanyu, Uttara and another prince of Matsya rushed in, only to meet a too early death. And so there fell another pair of brothers, and to save a critical situation, helmet-wearing Arjun turned his chariot thither. Drupad also drove to

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this centre, but it was impossible for them to save the Pandav lines from being broken.

Bhishma scattered his foe as a fire consumes a forest. No one could withstand the dash of his chariot and the hissing, glistening arrows that sprang from his circled bow. The Pandavs stood watching, fascinated yet benumbed, like a senseless herd of cattle in a bleak winter wind. Wherever Bhishma went, his path was strewn with the dead, until night drew on, and for a time the battle must cease.

The sons of Pandu wearily and sadly withdrew to their tents.

Yudhishthir wept for the severe loss of life, and conferred with Krishna, whose help he implored during the following day.

No sooner had the Sun-god driven his chariot of fire down the slopes of the eastern mountains than Krishna and the helmet-wearing Arjun were driving to the battle. Immediately there arose the palm-tree standard of Bhishma, and the monkey-emblem flying from Arjun's car showed that he had chosen as his foeman the ancient general of Duryodhan's army.

Dhrishtadyumna, brother of Draupadi, was fighting with the Panchalas against the mighty Drona. The old warrior's sharpened arrows pierced the mail of the Panchala prince, shattered his breastplate and rattled like hail upon him. One dart cut his bow-string ; another, a mighty shaft, cut his mace ; his horses fell, and the driver tumbled lifeless upon them ; his face was smeared with blood. The youth, bravely seizing his sabre, jumped from the car, and

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rushed forward like a wild beast in the pangs of hunger. Still the darts of Drona came on. He caught them upon his huge shield and rushed forward. He would have met his doom, however, had not Bhima observed and intercepted Drona. This intervention called forth Duryodhan's anger, and he threw the forces of Kalinga against Bhima. On they came, dusky fellows, like the fierce tornado or the tempestuous ocean. The darkness was thickening, and it was more difficult to distinguish friend from foe.

The prince of Kalinga fell to Bhima, but the deathful hero could not meet the king on favourable terms. The monarch of Kalinga fought from the back of his war elephant, protected by the howdah. Bhima singled him out at last from the elephant corps, dismounted and ran to the tusker's side. Nimbly springing, he alighted on its back, and there fought Kalinga. After a short fight, he struck Kalinga the fatal blow, severing his body in twain. At this dreadful sight the forces of Kalinga fell back and fled.

Duryodhan had a son, by name Lakshman. The part he took in the battle was against Abhimanyu. Duryodhan had watched the combat awhile, and, fearful for Lakshman's life, came to his assistance. Arjun, however, was not unmindful of Abhimanyu, and the instant Duryodhan made the combat unequal, Arjun wheeled his car and uprose in terrible wrath. The Kurus heard, and raised the cry 'Arjun! Arjun!' and fled like the cows in the stampede—men, horses, elephants.

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Krishna handled the steeds of the chariot and drove fiercely. The voice of Arjun's shell mounted higher than the noise of battle, but the accents of his bow, Gandiva, were but preludes to loud cries of fear and the despair of the Kuru army.

Onward they drove, till Arjun had completely routed the Kurus before the fall of night.

Next morning Duryodhan was excessively anxious, for his chiefs fled before Arjun's car. He shook with rage, and angrily blamed Bhishma for the previous day's lack of success.

'Bhishma,' he said, 'are you leading the Kurus in this blood-stained field? Is Drona guarding us? If so, why do the Kurus fly, and what is our leader doing here while the battle proceeds? Have you some secret love of the Pandavs? Does your admiration of them cloud your faith in the Kuru forces? Does it overshadow your own might? If your heart inclines to the Pandavs, give the leadership to the noble Karna.'

At this Bhishma's brow flamed with anger, and a tear rose to his eye. He trembled with rage as he replied, in as few words as possible: 'Our efforts are in vain, rash Duryodhan. Neither the ancient warrior Bhishma, nor Drona, the most skilled in war, nor Karna, the proud and brave archer, can atone for sinful deeds and broken laws. It is useless to think that trickery will prevail against the cause of righteousness. Duryodhan, deaf to the voice of wisdom, to parents and friends, you are doomed to die in your folly.

'For the insults you have offered the good wife

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of Yudhishthir, for stealing his kingdom, for plotting against his life, by the oath of Bhima at Hastina, for the neglect of Krishna's advice and warning, Duryodhan, you are doomed by heaven.

'But for the present Bhishma leads Duryodhan's forces: so he goes to the front of the battle whether to conquer or to perish.'

Thus saying, Bhishma mounted his chariot and rushed to battle, sweeping Yudhishthir's army from flank to flank without check. Neither Arjun nor Krishna could stop him. His course was marked by a sacrifice of life and a waste of chariots. In their haste to escape, the Pandav soldiers unloosed their harness and fled, their hair streaming in the wind.

Krishna noticed the effect of Bhishma's onslaught. To Arjun he said, 'Arjun, it is not your habit to fly in the hour of pressure. Your path has always been the forward one to glory—to end in either conquest or death. Should it happen to-day that you turn away from Bhishma, it will be a shame to Krishna. If I flee with you, Arjun, then mine alone be the blame! I will use my discus and smite the foe.' Therewith Krishna flung the reins to Arjun, leapt down from the car and rushed headlong into the fight.

Arjun was angry at this speech, and followed Krishna on foot. 'Hold!' he cried, 'Krishna must not enter the combat, and Arjun has no intention of seeking a cowardly safety in flight.'

Arjun at length overtook Krishna as the latter ran forward with eyes fixed on the dreadful death-worker of the Kurus. The warrior seized Krishna,

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lifted him up and hurried back with him to the chariot. Bending his knee, he said, 'Forgive me, Krishna, for thus forcing your return, and pardon me that I laid rough hands on you. Put up your discus, as long as Arjun is alive. By my son, the war-trained Abhimanyu, the darling of Subhadra, by my brothers now dearer and more faithful than ever in the days of peace, by my own word, I swear, Krishna—put up your discus; helmet-wearing Arjun meets his foe.' Straightway the fiery warrior drove the chariot into the battle, and the ranks of the foe parted like waves.

Duryodhan hurled his lance at Arjun's face. Salya from his car flung his mace. Arjun dashed them all aside and held aloft his bow, Gandiva. The Pandavs rallied. Their allies took fresh heart. The Kurus also came forth under Bhishma's leading.

The night fires were lit and gradually the war was suspended, as fainting chiefs and wounded soldiers dragged themselves to their tents.

Another day dawned on the crimson plain. It was a sad day for the Kurus. Many weeping queens there were at Hastina for that day's work. Like a whirl-wind Bhima swept the field. Duryodhan ordered a serried line of elephants to oppose the prince. But Bhima charged and broke through them. He rained arrows upon Duryodhan: with eight arrows he smote Salya. Fourteen of Duryodhan's brothers rushed upon him. Bhima, full of vengeance, surveyed them a moment, and as a lion measuring the distance of its advancing prey licks its jaws and

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lolls its tongue, so did Bhima. A short, sharp fight ensued, and six of the princes turned pale and fled. Eight of the fourteen fell, to be mourned that night at Hastina's palace.

Another day dawned red. Again Bhima and Arjun led the war, and Drona opposed them. Again Lakshman, son of Duryodhan, strove with Abhimanyu, but soon his faithful servant carried away the Kuru prince. The Vrishni warriors from the south, and allies of the Pandavs, lost heavily this day. Ten brave princes of Vrishni, all sons of Satyaki, fell.

The fight went on with the next dawn. Bhima broke through Duryodhan's ranks into the midst of danger. A hundred foemen collected and Bhima saw that it was a struggle for his life and fought with fury. From another part of the field Drupad saw Bhima's plight, and he struggled through the press to the aid of Bhima, who was still defending himself by the side of his broken car. He assisted Bhima to the seat in the chariot, but the Kurus had closed in again as the black waters meet on the farther side of the rock that parted them. At this time Abhimanyu and a dozen brave chiefs charged in and rescued them. The Kurus pressed hotly the rest of that day, and Drona continued the pursuit until it was too dark to see.

The next day added itself to the dreadful battle. Arjun was the first warrior astir. He raised his monkey-standard, and Krishna drove the white horses, and dismay fell upon the beholders. Bhishma's palm-tree banner rose. Then it was in

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vain that Yudhishthir, Bhima and Arjun worked to save their men. Nothing could equal the might that Bhishma put forth that day. Yudhishthir's banner was over-thrown, his car shaken and his horses thrown down. The twin Pandavs strove gallantly, but in vain, and night came down over their broken forces.

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XV

FALL OF BHISHMA

Arjun's Son Slain—Rout of the Pandavs—Bhishma urged by Duryodhan—Krishna's Ruse.

THE eighth day of battle dawned. Early in the conflict Bhishma's charioteer was slain and his horses galloped reinless over the field, doing terrible damage among the leading Kuru warriors.

One of Arjun's sons, named Iravat, was singled out by several princes of Gandhara, a land famed for its wonderful horses. The assailants rushed across the plain like sea-birds flying lightly over the ocean. Five of them had then rushed to their doom, and a sixth fled, stumbling with fear.

Alas for the instability of human affairs! Another warrior charged Iravat, and after a fierce combat the son of Arjun fell, as the lotus whose stem is snapped.

Arjun heard the mournful news and his heart contracted with grief. A few sorrowing words he spoke.

'O Krishna, why did we mix ourselves up in this terrible war for a kingdom? Our relatives and friends are being slaughtered,—the price we elect to pay! Woe to the empire founded upon the graves of

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children! O Iravat, dearer than a king's crown, beautiful and young, with the charming eyes of thy mother, is it true that thou art slain, when thy father was not with thee? But the blood of youth must be avenged! Krishna, drive on. Those who killed the son must feel the power of the father.'

Krishna drove on. Arjun dashed the tear away, and spoke no more, but the gaps in the ranks of the foe were more eloquent to his grief than words.

Iravat was revenged also by Bhima, whose victorious course was marked by the slain brothers of Duryodhan.

As evening fell torches were lit outside the tents and red fires burned. Duryodhan sat some time brooding over the critical condition of things. When the stars were risen he paced over the reddened sward to the tent of Bhishma. Within the snowy tent he wept, and amid the heaving of deep sighs he said bitterly:

'Bhishma, the fate of the Kuru kingdom and race depends upon your unmatched power. None in earth or heaven can prevail against you. Pandu's sons are brave, but they cannot face you. They have slain my brothers! Remember your pledge, be the saviour of our royal line; show to the ancient king, your power and grace. Forgive me now if I pain you, but if in that noble bosom there is a subtle love for the sons of Pandu, allow Karna to lead my forces in the battle!'

The old warrior shed a tear and was overcome with sadness at the thoughts which these words aroused. With a clear judgment he spoke. 'Duryodhan, I tell

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you this conflict is in vain. Your force is mighty, but it fights in vain. You are turning the plain red with the blood of friends, but why? Surely they whose cause is right must win! "Doubly armed the stalwart warrior who is armed in righteous cause."

'Think, Duryodhan, of the day when the Gandharvas captured you: it was Arjun who set you free. When we seized Virata's herds it was Arjun who defeated us. And now Krishna is with Arjun and drives his car. Neither gods nor men can face these two heroes. Your ruin is upon you, Duryodhan, and on your nation. You have been proud and foolish, but your fate has almost overtaken you.

'Bhishma will do his duty. His end is very near, but when he is gone then find another leader. This war, I fear, will dissolve our state.'

At dawn the signal for slaughter was given. Bhishma drove with more determination than ever, if it was possible. From morn to noon he scattered the Pandavs, and from noon to night he shattered them. At last, once more merciful night brought a pause.

Yudhishthir, looking over the dark plain of Kurukshetra, was overcome with grief at the numbers of his warriors slain by Bhishma. 'The battle,' he cried, 'drags on without an end in sight, and this terrible loss of life seems to bring us no return of victory. Bhishma carries all before him. He is like a magnificent elephant trampling the reeds of a marsh, and as a forest fire consumes the dried wood, he destroys my armies. Neither gods nor mortals can withstand him. It is to no purpose that

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our friends and kinsmen are brave and have lost their lives, and my valiant brothers are spited by fortune. Whole nations are pouring their life-blood freely, but in vain, and the woeful sound of wailing rises anew each night. Krishna, stop this slaughter and let us go back to the woods!'

That midnight they held a council, but not many words were spoken. They went to Bhishma to ask his goodwill. Now Bhishma had had a great part in the up-bringing of these princes, and he regarded them almost with the love of a father, but his first duty was to Duryodhan.

'Sons of Pandu,' the old warrior said, 'my fealty is sworn to Prince Duryodhan, and I am no faithless servant to depart from my troth. You are all brave leaders in war, but there is no warrior on earth who can prevail against me in the battle. Again hear me. The conquered foe, the fugitive, the fallen, the weaponless, who cries for quarter—all these I never fight. Bhishma never fights a rival who yields, worn out with the struggle. I do not fight the wounded or one born a woman!'

The Pandavs returned to their tents with Krishna, who, reflecting on Bhishma's speech, saw the way out of their difficulty. He whispered to Arjun.

'There is one chance of success. Do you remember that Bhishma said he would fight no wounded soldier, no woman born? Now Drupad's youngest son was born a female, and the gods changed him into the warrior he now is. This is the plan: place Sikhandin in the front of the battle, and when

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Bhishma sees him he will retire. Then the victory will easily be ours, although his life will be paid.'

Arjun did not like the proposal.

'That is a shameful thought,' he cried angrily. 'Heroes do not use secret methods of fighting, or hide behind children or women. Krishna, I am loth to go further with this thing and to work tricks and fraud upon the fine old Bhishma. When I was a boy, Krishna, I used to play on Bhishma's knee. I called him father, and could scarcely be taken from his side. Perdition seize the kingdom won by such deceit; ruin overtake the sceptre gained at the cost of the holy Bhishma's life!'

Krishna calmly answered, 'The close of to-day will see the close of Bhishma's life. He will be the victim in the cause of righteousness as he himself showed. Arjun, make no difference between foemen, whether loved or hated: thou shalt fight and slay. For what other purpose hast thou poured the blood of nations on the field?'

Morning found the Pandav chiefs ready to attack Bhishma. Duryodhan saw their intention, flung his forces against them and checked the onset. Duhsasan, eager for the fray, attacked Arjun, and the darts fell so thick and fast that they drank brave men's blood. Each Kuru captain attacked the Pandav leaders, and the fighting that day was the fiercest of all. The dust rose like clouds, arrows in their flight made the sky dark, cars crashed, mailed horsemen fell, elephants charged wildly and lay with broken tusks and lacerated bodies.

Arjun and Bhima penetrated the throngs and

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drove their chariots side by side. Suddenly Arjun caught sight of Bhishma and he had to shade his eyes. He half wished to turn away from the bright countenance of Bhishma.

Krishna drove the car and whispered that the time was come to use the stratagem. Arjun sent Sikhandin into the thick of the fight near Bhishma. Suddenly the warlike expression vanished from the old warrior's face. He looked upon the Pandav hosts without a sign of hatred. The mighty bow of Arjun, the ponderous mace of Bhima had no significance for him at that moment. He saw the fair Sikhandin, and smiled as the youth rushed valiantly into the fight, as a foamy crest flies along the ocean waves. Bhishma remembered his oath, and let his arms drop as the warrior who had been born a girl approached. The palm-tree standard was now idle and the banner fell by the pole, casting a shadow on the chariot-seat. Then the staff fell, and it was as if a brilliant star or meteor had vanished from the sky.

Sikhandin's arrows had no part in felling the standard, neither did his weak lances make Bhishma afraid. It was his oath which he kept. He gave no more resistance, but turned his face away and fell as the sun neared the last bank of clouds. So the battle ended for the night.

A truce was declared, and the dying Bhishma's side was the scene of mourning both by Kurus and Pandavs. The old man was so pierced with arrows that hardly a space of two fingers' breadth remained. In former days he had been granted the power to delay the moment of his death until the sun was in

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an auspicious part of the heaven. The arrows were not withdrawn from the wounds, and Arjun took three from his quiver, and placed them so that the old hero could rest upon them and wait the moment of good omen for departing this life.

The ancient warrior spoke to Duryodhan in quiet but solemn tones. 'Duryodhan,' he said, 'attend to my words, given with my parting breath. Take the council of Bhishma, and pay respect to the voice of death. If your hard heart has any grief in it, put an end to this war, and save the nations and chiefs while yet they live. Restore Yudhishthir's kingdom. He is a man whom Heaven favours. Be content with your own land of Hastina, and let all the past be forgiven.'

But, alas, the angel words of Bhishma served to rekindle the hatred in Duryodhan's black heart.

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XVI

MOURNING OF ARJUN AND SUBHADRA

Abhimanyu Out-numbered — A Mace Duel — The Pandav Standards—Duh-sasan Wounded—How Abhimanyu Died.

THE princes left the arrow-bed of Bhishma as the midnight came, but another visitor, who would never have come in the days of Bhishma's prosperity, silently stole through the darkness to the dying man's side.

Bhishma heard the soft footsteps, and opened his eyes, bright no longer, and greeted the archer with love. He sighed as he sadly spoke. 'Noble Karna, our hearts have been filled with pride and envy, which now must roll away with my departing breath. I should have much to tell thee, but my voice grows feeble. Arjun is not superior to Karna in deeds of valour, or in birth. Karna, thou art Pritha's son. Thou art born of the Sun, god and man. Pritha gave thee into the keeping of a charioteer and his wife, and there is not the equal of thee as an archer in all the world.

'Arjun is thy brother. Therefore, Karna, end

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this war in which brothers and kinsmen destroy each other. Be not guilty of thy brother's blood, nor drive thy chariot against him ! '

Again the heavenly wisdom of Bhishma was in vain, for Karna was excited to a fiercer hatred than he had yet displayed.

In place of Bhishma, Drona was appointed leader of the Kurus, and Duryodhan asked him to capture Yudhishthir alive. When this came to the ears of Arjun, he told his elder brother that, excepting for the command in holy writ that a preceptor is a sacred person, Drona should not come at Yudhishthir unless over his blood.

Drona tried to carry out his promise, but Yudhishthir was well guarded by the Pandav brothers, and foremost of all was Abhimanyu, whose deeds were a credit to both his father and mother. The youth dragged a warrior out of his chariot by the hair, as a lion drags an ox. Jayadratha, seeing this, rushed upon Abhimanyu; the latter turned to face his assailant, and many a blow was given and parried.

The armies watched the duel for some minutes, till Jayadratha's sword pierced the other's buckler and Abhimanyu snapped the blade. The king of Sindhu then ran to his car for shelter, but Salya took up the quarrel. Abhimanyu turned to him, but Bhima engaged Salya with the mace. These two warriors were the greatest mace-men in both armies. Their favourite weapons were made of seasoned wood, studded with metal. A hempen loop and wires of twisted gold were attached to the shaft of the

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mace for greater security, and, as the mace was swung round, a circle of golden light appeared. The combatants struck each other often, and sparks fell from the wood. As they surveyed each other, you would have thought they were maddened bulls in the meadow, or elephants contending for the herd, or eagles, or red-clawed tigers. Their blows fell like thunder, but, as the lightning strikes a mountain and glances harmless away, so neither fell or staggered. They closed in and watchfully fought, raining blows thick and fast until they both fell. Bhima seized his staff, but faltered like a drunkard, while Salya, senseless and writhing like a snake, was carried out of the battle.

Meanwhile Drona had done well towards capturing Yudhishthir. The twin brothers had failed to stop the Kuru leader's advance. Virata and Drupad had also failed, and the cry rose in the Pandav army, 'Yudhishthir is captured!'

Arjun heard the cry, and wheeled his chariot with its white horses into the thick of the fight. He blew his sankha, and the battle grew fiercer, until evening called a truce.

Next day Drona still pursued his object, and slew several of the Panchala chiefs who attacked him. Other Pandav warriors rushed in to uphold their ancient name.

Bhima drove a chariot drawn by dappled-deer tinted horses. The prince of Panchala drove grey and dove-coloured steeds. Nakula's chariot—unusually large and well fitted—was drawn by dark and grey horses of a famous breed. Sahadeva's car could be

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distinguished by its piebald horses, and Yudhishthir's by its white steeds with black manes.

Drupad carried his royal emblem, the golden umbrella, and Virata chose horses of a bright bay.

Each monarch and chief flew a symbol. Drona, who as a child had rested in a water-jar, had a water-jar worked on a tawny deer-skin as his banner. A golden moon surrounded with stars was Yudhishthir's symbol. Bhima's standard was a silver lion; Nakula's, a red deer with its back of bright gold; Sahadeva's, a silver swan with bells; Abhimanyu preferred a golden peacock richly emblazoned; and Bhima's son rushed to battle in the shadow of a vulture banner.

All these signs of Pandav activity Duryodhan saw, and Bhima attacked him. He was soon taken away wounded, and most of his warriors slain. Bhima was now attacked by Bhagadatta, a king from the east, whose army had never yet been beaten. Arjun turned to help his brother. Suddenly Bhagadatta's elephant dropped, pierced by many an arrow, and the monarch fell to rise no more.

Until this day Karna's bow had been idle. Eaten with jealousy of the great leader Bhishma, Karna had not entered the action, but now he looked round and saw his comrades mostly fled, and Arjun whirling over the field with none to challenge. Hatred flashed from Karna's eye, as he rushed upon Arjun, his nearest of kin. A fierce duel ensued, and on the respective sides, Duryodhan and the king of Sindhu, and Bhima and Panchala's chiefs, joined in the gory fight.

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The next day was the day of Abhimanyu's death. Drona had arranged his armies in a circle, and the Pandavs tried to break through. Abhimanyu succeeded, scattering all the lines—foot, horse, elephants—that made up the ring. Duryodhan rushed upon him to close the breach, but many of the Kurus were slain, and Duryodhan was obliged to fall back. Salya next strove to stay the young light of war, but the famous mace-wielder was taken from the ground wounded.

The next Kuru warrior to advance was Duh-sasan, who first shot an arrow which missed. Abhimanyu smiled to see his dearest foe, and said, 'Are you Duh-sasan, famous for cruelty and a wicked heart? Did you compound with Sakuni to cheat Yudhishthir at the dice? Was it you that insulted Yudhishthir's queen, and dragged her to the Council Chamber by her raven tresses? Welcome, for I have often tried to meet you. Now you shall receive the reward of your greed and insults to Queen Draupadi, for to her I owe your death.'

With that he drew an arrow, and, hissing through the air, it fell upon Duh-sasan's heart.

Next came Duryodhan's son, Lakshman, who fell to Arjun's son. Abhimanyu passed on. Jayadratha, with other six car-borne monarchs, attacked the youth. The seven closed round him, so he fought alone. His peacock standard fell, his car was broken, the driver slain. Then his bow was broken and his sabre snapped. Bleeding, yet not fearing death, Abhimanyu wiped his forehead and looked at his foes.

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Then in a last effort he seized his mace, and rushed upon them.

He fell. Like a lordly elephant slain by hunters: like a fierce forest fire quenched: like a terrific mountain tempest suddenly hushed: like the god of day setting behind a western hill: or the serene silver moon eclipsed and darkened—Abhimanyu lay dead, and the gentle star-light shone upon the field.

As the camp fires flared fitfully that night, they lit up a scene of carnage.

Arjun was returning from a distant quarter of the field, when he noticed how quiet everything was.

'For some reason, Krishna,' he said, 'I feel sad and begin to sigh. It is strange that no evening bugle winds on the battle-field and the hearty conch shell is silent. The warriors do not cheer themselves as usual with the trumpet. We are drawing near Yudhishthir's tent. How quiet it is! My brothers all look pale. Even Abhimanyu does not run out to greet Krishna and his sire. The love of Abhimanyu is like a blessing from on high—the delight of the fair Subhadra and my pride and joy.'

The gentle Yudhishthir met Arjun, and with many a tear told the sad but glorious story of Abhimanyu's death—a death of which any Kshatra might be proud.

Arjun heard the story. It was the sharpest wound he could ever receive. He sank helpless on the ground, murmuring 'My brave boy!' and there he lay in bitter sorrow for some minutes. Then he arose, and anger filled his mind.

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'Didst thou say that Jayadratha and six Kuru princes attacked my boy alone? Have the Kurus thus broken the Kshatras' laws of honour? A father's curse shall haunt them to their last breath, for they feared my son, and stealthily laid wait for him to kill him. Good Yudhishthir and holy Krishna witness my vow! Arjun's hand shall slay the slayer! May I never reach the bright realms whither my fathers have gone, may I descend to the deepest hell where live the greatest sinners, the men who slay their fathers and their mothers, who steal the wealth and food of sainted priests, who nurse enmity and glory in lies—unless by to-morrow's evening Jayadratha is dead. Jayadratha shall be my victim to-morrow, or Arjun shall ascend the flaming pyre.'

A gentler moan, but deeply bitter, was Subhadra's, sister of Krishna, wife of Arjun and mother of the murdered boy.

'Does my boy lie on the field of battle in the dust and stained with the blood of his foes? My sweet child of love that I bore! Thine eyes are gentle as the lotus-bud, and thy face is kind, but now those eyes are closed and thy beauty will fade. Thy limbs, fair and beautiful, now lie on the ground, and the vulture beats its wings and jackals prowl near. Thy bosom once was graced with jewels and thy crest with gems, but now thy deep chest wears the honour of thy foes' sabre marks. Let them kill me too, with a sorrow which knows no relief. Earth is no longer a place of joy to me, but lone and dreary without Abhimanyu. And what of the

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young wife of my son? I can offer her no joy. Our lives will end in equal gloom, for earth has no more day for us, since our delight, Abhimanyu, is gone.'

Subhadra mourned; and the sweet Draupadi tore her tresses, and the princess of Matsya, so early a widow, shed a tear of blood.

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XVII

FALL OF DRONA

Drona urged by Duryodhan—Yudhishthir's One Sin—Karna's Boast—Yudhishthir Shamed.

THE shroud of night was withdrawn, and Arjun wakened the warriors with a loud blast on his sankha. The Kurus knew that sound well, and when they looked over the red field, they saw Arjun as he bade Krishna, 'Speed to-day, for I must perform my vow.'

At once the dashing horses flew like lightning to the Kuru lines. The first brave Kuru to oppose Arjun was slain, and the car passed on. Duh-sasan next opposed him with a line of elephants; but they took fright, and still the car passed on.

Drona then prevented Arjun's progress, and the son of Pandu's eyes filled with tears as he gently said, 'Forgive me, father, if I turn aside from the contest you offer to-day; Arjun must seek the slayer of his Abhimanyu. I do not draw my bow against my loved preceptor; a dutiful son does not fight against a father whom he loves! My load of grief is heavy. It is a father seeking the slayer of his son. Therefore I will pass by the mighty Drona to perform my vow!'

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The car sped on, not hindered by the Kalingas or by the mountain forces, and right behind the Kuru lines it halted where Jayadratha stood.

The passage of the lines had taken till noon : the sun was pouring down his fiercest heat, and Krishna said, ' Arjun, your task has tried your charges to the full, and they need rest.'

Arjun agreed, and they dismounted. He took his bow and stood under a leafy tree, watching the fight, while Krishna groomed the horses, healed their wounds, bathed them in a stream, and gave them fodder. When they were ready Krishna harnessed them to the car. Arjun mounted, and they rushed into the battle.

Before him were the Kuru chiefs, and he could see Jayadratha's ensign, a bright silver boar, surrounded by many others. Nine Kuru chiefs headed for Arjun. He fixed his eyes on Jayadratha, and made a straight course towards him. It was now late in the day when Karna and five other chiefs surrounded the king of Sindhu, and Arjun charged Karna fiercely, as he saw the day was closing.

Krishna whispered a prayer, and a dense cloud came over the sun. The Kurus knew of Arjun's vow, and they were pleased to think night was closing in, for then Arjun's life would be forfeit. They slackened their fury, and Jayadratha was joyful at the approach of night.

All the Kuru chiefs made the same mistake, and Arjun in a lightning-like fury broke their line completely, and flung himself upon Jayadratha.

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He let fly the fatal arrow, and Jayadratha fell lifeless.

Winds came and removed the cloud, and the sun poured his reddish light over the redder field. Before evening came on, Bhima had slain many of Duryodhan's brothers, and Duryodhan in his madness continued fighting even when the torches were lit.

Karna, too, continued, vengeful for the death of Jayadratha and Duryodhan's brothers. He drove his car in the darkness against Bhima's son. The brave youth twice killed Karna's horses, but Karna made a third attack, and this time fatally succeeded with his dart.

Then the midnight battle ceased. The stars shone in silence. But there was no slumber for Bhima.

Before dawn next morning Duryodhan spoke to the leader of his armies. 'Drona,' he said, 'the battle goes against us. The Kuru chiefs are falling, and my brothers are nearly all killed. How can we falter while you, the best of generals, are guiding our war? The sons of Pandu are no more than pupils to you, and Arjun does not dare meet you. How is it then that every battle is our loss? Are the fates against us, or have you some secret affection for Pandu's sons? If you have any merciful feeling for them, give place to Karna, prince of Anga.'

Drona fearlessly answered:

'You reap the harvest of your sinful deeds. Do not presume to throw blame upon the hoary warriors.' Drona is faithful to his promises. Ask yourself, Duryodhan, why you do not fight with Arjun for your honour. Ask the trickster Sakuni what avails his

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cunning : why does he not use the weapon as skilfully as he plays the loaded dice ? Ask Karna, who boasted he would slay Arjun, why Arjun still rules the battle.

'This is the truth : Arjun has no peer on earth, and no warrior lives who can face him. But Drona knows his duty, and it is the will of Heaven that to-day either Arjun or preceptor Drona shall die.'

The sun rose, empurpling the field ; the monarchs dismounted from their cars, faced the splendour in the skies, and joined hands for the worship. Verses and hymns were chanted, after which the day's battle began.

The Pandav armies had the worse of the fray. The Brahman warrior, Drona, was without an equal, and Arjun would not fight with him, and no one else dared. The old feud between Drona and the Panchalas revived, and several of the princes rushed upon the doughty chief. Drona fought like a jungle tiger in this feud, and soon Drupad's grandsons lay dead. Drupad, seeing this, was filled with hatred and, side by side with Virata, charged Drona. A cry of terror rose, for both the monarchs were quickly slain.

The fair Draupadi wept for her sire, and the princess of Matsya, so lately widowed, mourned her father's loss.

Drona urged his course victoriously everywhere, and nothing but a chance of battle could have altered the results. Drona had a son of great fame as a soldier, named Aswat-thaman. It happened that one of the war elephants was called after him, and the mighty Bhima slew this tusker.

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Rapidly the word was passed round, 'Aswat-thaman, son of Drona, is slain!' Presently Drona heard the report, and he bent his head in sorrow.

Meeting Yudhishthir, the proud old man cried, 'Yudhishthir, thou hast never told a lie; tell me of my son, Aswat-thaman. Is he fallen in this battle? Is he slain? Nerveless are my hands and my power vanishes. My hair is white like snow, and my earthly tasks are over!'

Yudhishthir answered, 'Tusker Aswat-thaman is dead!'

Drona did not hear that Yudhishthir spoke of the elephant, and his spirit forsook him. At that moment Dhrishtadyumna, son of the slain King Drupad, drove at Drona's car, poised his bow and took a perfect aim. So died preceptor Drona. And henceforth Yudhisthir's chariot was bound to touch the earth as that of every man who had sinned.

The day ended; the Kurus fled in terror: Arjun, like a dutiful son, mourned his loved preceptor, and dropped the tear of a man in grief.

Duryodhan was full of sorrow the next day, until he saw Karna, who, he had long thought, would make the best leader of the Kurus. He therefore spoke his mind.

'Karna, on you alone depend the honour and victory of the Kurus. Therefore mount your chariot, and lead them forth to successful war. Bhishma was a matchless warrior, but he was prevented from doing his best by a certain love for Yudhishthir, and preceptor Drona, too, beyond reproach for his skill, was ineffective by reason of the personal regard he held

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for Arjun. But you combine the skill of both, and in addition you hate the Pandavs. Therefore, Karna, it is for you to lead us to victory by your prowess, and may your hate assist the blows!'

The Kurus hailed him leader, and as such he was consecrated by the priests after the following manner. Earthen jars full of holy water were placed around him, and beside him were an elephant's tusk and the horn of a bull. Gems, jewels, gold and grain were placed on the ground at his feet, and over his head— he was wearing a crown as king of Anga—was spread a fine silken cloth. The Brahmans poured the holy water, and the national bards sang his praises, and the people of all grades but the lowest acclaimed him leader. It was part of the Brahmans' blessing, as they received the gifts, to bid him conquer the sons of Pritha.

The ceremony over, Karna ranged his forces, and was soon driving to the front. He and Arjun met and contended fiercely, but neither gained the advantage that day.

Before setting out to fight next morning, Karna said to Duryodhan, 'To-day, O King of Kuru, Arjun dies, or in fulfilling my duty I shall be slain. We have hated each other all our lives, but chance has always prevented the closing of the quarrel. But yon red sun is the last that shall shine on us both. There is no room on earth for the glory of Arjun and the fame of Karna. One must fade while the other glows brighter.

'As to our weapons, we are scarcely unequal. Arjun does not excel me in accuracy of aim or speed.

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His bow, Gandiva, may be the gift of one god above ; mine is the gift of another. Still there is one thing in which Arjun does excel me. His milk-white steeds cannot be matched, and Krishna drives them very skilfully. Arjun, with Krishna holding the reins, sweeps across the battlefield like a meteor in the sky. Give me Salya to drive my horses, and I shall be equal in everything to Arjun.'

This was agreed upon, and when Salya mounted, Karna cried, 'I will give a hundred cows, raiment and gold, to him who will point out to me my foeman. Horses, fields, towns and beautiful slaves shall be his who shows me where Arjun is hiding.'

King Salya, as he pulled in the reins, laughed merrily at Karna's words. 'You need offer no rewards,' he said. 'It is not like Arjun to hide when a battle is being fought. You will see him before long. He will be upon you like the tiger upon his prey, or as the herd leader kills the ailing lamb, as the lion upon the deer, he will smite you, Karna, for he is not afraid. Then you may guard yourself, archer, and I will hold the reins.'

Karna scowled at him, and Salya gave the horses the rein, and soon Karna was facing Yudhishthir. For a moment they were parted by the onrush of an army, but again they met. Yudhishthir angrily shouted, 'So you, Karna, have vowed to take Arjun's life. You are the slave of Duryodhan, and do his bidding. Your vow will not be performed, as you shall be sent to slumber by my hand.'

With this Yudhishthir drew his bow, and, with a force that would have sent an arrow deep into a

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mountain, struck Karna in the left side, so that he fell senseless.

In a moment he recovered, drew his bow, and shot several arrows at Yudhishthir, striking his armour from him. Yudhishthir continued the fight, using his lances to good purpose. Karna, pale with pain, and angry, fiercely bore down on Yudhishthir, cut down his banner and battered his royal car. Then he drove his steeds and wheeled his chariot, preparing to deal a swift arrow. Yudhishthir, bleeding, without armour or car, sought safety in flight.

Karna mocked him. 'Run, frightened fellow, more famous for prayers than brave deeds. I will shed no more of your blood. Go and recite your verses; and if you see Arjun, tell him to come and meet me.'

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XVIII

THE WAR ENDS

Yudhishthir urges Arjun—Karna's Fate overtakes him —Duryodhan flees—Bhima and Duryodhan.

YUDHISHTHIR, humiliated and wrathful, retired to his tent, where presently Arjun and Krishna met him.

'Have you killed Karna yet?' said Yudhishthir. 'O slothful Arjun, this low-born fellow is dealing death on the plain and guarding the Kurus. He slew my driver and tore down my banner, and now my horses and the fragments of my chariot lie on the field: it was a narrow escape for myself. Oh, a mockery for friend and foe, and all my honour gone! For thirteen years now I have known neither rest nor peace, and as long as Karna lives all our insults will live. Have you slain that proud chief, Arjun? Have you expunged our shame in the blood of the charioteer?'

Krishna answered, 'Arjun fought his way to him from a distance, and now vows Karna's death.'

Yudhishthir gave way to anger, and unjustly railed against Arjun. 'Why does Arjun stand like a painted warrior, holding a great bow in a useless hand, why is this sabre dangling from the golden

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belt, why does Krishna drive Arjun's horses—if Arjun hides from the centre of the fight, if Arjun allows Karna to go free and unvanquished? Give up the bow to better hands, Arjun, and appoint a braver man to fly your banner. Leave your helmet, sword and shield, go and hide yourself. Karna is the conqueror!'

Arjun's eye flashed anger, and he swiftly put his hand on his sabre. In an instant the blade was drawn. Krishna stepped forward to prevent the impassioned murder of a brother, and tried to soothe the angry leaders.

'Draw thy sword, Arjun, not in the presence of thine elder brother and king, but before thy foeman, who courses on the field. Do not give way to sinful anger. Sheathe thy sword, and the sin will be forgiven.'

Arjun obeyed the serene command of Krishna, and his wrath turned to sorrow. Yudhishthir had been dear to him, and was dearer with each passing day; and as Arjun reflected how near he had been to killing his brother, he wept manly tears, and said, 'Forgive me, elder brother and king; pardon my angry words. But your command to give up my weapons wounded my very soul. My bow, Gandiva, is more precious than my life. Grant me pardon as I kneel and give me your grace.'

Yudhishthir, too, was calmer by this time. He gently raised his brother, and pressed him to his bosom. 'Arjun,' he said, 'the fault is mine. I have cruelly wronged thee by my hasty words. I was deeply dishonoured in that I fled from Karna, and

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in my anguish I was thoughtless. Forgive me, and in kindness wipe away my words from thy memory.'

Strengthened by his brother's blessing, Arjun mounted his car and soon met Karna, driven by Salya. Often they were separated, but at last they joined in a desperate struggle. Arjun's arrows fell like the summer rain, and Karna's licked the blood of Arjun like so many serpents. Arjun shot so fast and furiously from Gandiva that its voice was continuous, till at last the heated bow-string would not stand the strain and snapped. Karna still shot.

'Keep the rules of warfare, Karna,' cried Arjun. 'When I have restrung my bow, I shall not beg for mercy!'

But Karna heeded not. He shot thickly and fiercely, and one of the shafts struck Arjun over the heart. Arjun mended his bow, and stood like the wounded tiger. Then he fell upon Karna with redoubled might. Karna cared nothing for Arjun's anger, and Arjun pursued him unrelenting. The fight was strenuous past all relating, and neither got the advantage until Karna's chariot passed over some soft earth and one of the wheels stuck fast.

Salya lashed the horses to their greatest effort, but they could not draw the tilted chariot. Karna dismounted and strove hard to raise the axle. But in vain; it was the working of fate. Years before a priest insulted by Karna had said, 'Thy chariot wheel will fail thee in thy hour of need'—and now the curse was due.

'Wait!' cried Karna. 'Do not carry on the

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battle treacherously while thy foeman is helpless and without a car.'

Arjun laughed very boisterously, but did not answer. Krishna, however, answered Karna's claim to honest warfare, recounting instances when Karna's virtue was at a discount.

'Did you,' he concluded, 'fight fairly when with six great chiefs you stalked Abhimanyu? Do not speak then of rules of honour. You will die in your sin, and here is Death in the guise of Arjun. It is your last hour.'

Karna carried on the fight with his utmost vigour, and the last arrow he shot at Arjun hurled him to the ground in a blood faint. For a moment warriors and celestial beings watched anxiously; but the swoon quickly passed, and Arjun rose like a fire newly lit. The thought of Abhimanyu nerved him to greater strife, and he placed an arrow in his bow and aimed with bated breath. All his power, all his hatred for the foe, all his love for his slain boy went into the force of that shaft. It sped like lightning, and Karna was no more.

Early next morning Kripa, the preceptor, spoke to Duryodhan. 'Kuru's forces now will be the prey of Arjun, and Bhima will seek the fulfilment of his vow. Satyaki, too, will revenge the untimely deaths of his sons. Duryodhan, put an end to the war. Yudhishthir even yet will consider righteous peace. Give him his kingdom, and let, the fatal strife be ended.'

To him Duryodhan replied, 'Kripa, ever brave, your counsel comes too late. Vengeance is vowed

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by our foes, I know. Even Draupadi seeks by penance to have her wish upon us. It shall never be said that Duryodhan after all his best were slain learned to yield for the sake of life. I shall ask no favour of the foe, even with my last breath. Salya leads to-day.'

At that time Yudhishthir made the disposition of his forces, and exhorted them to complete the victory.

In the fight Salya's standard fell, but Drona's son saved him, and in the next onset he slew Yudhisthir's horses and rushed upon the king. Yudhishthir bravely hurled his dart and Salya fell.

Sahadeva's weapon pierced the wily Sakuni, and Bhima slew all the remaining brothers of Duryodhan, who fled from the field.

He wandered away from the battle, and sought rest by a clear lake, but the Pandav Princes tracked him to his den. Duryodhan rose and cried, 'We have been enemies since boyhood, but we have met for our last time. I will fight all of you. Duryodhan or the sons of Pandu shall die.'

Bhima answered and claimed the privilege of fighting. He reminded Duryodhan of the plots against their lives since the night at Varnavata. Passing on step by step, he held Duryodhan responsible for the deaths of Bhishma, Drona and Karna.

The two fought fiercely by the side of the lake. Sparks fell from their maces and both bled profusely, but neither yielded. Bhima, however, seeing Arjun slapping himself on the thigh remembered the oath

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he swore at Hastina, when Duryodhan insulted Draupadi. One part of this was fulfilled, for he had drunk of Duh-sasan's blood, and he determined now to act the remainder. Therefore he raised his mace, and aimed a foul blow, breaking Duryodhan's thigh.

Night fell, one of the dreadful nights of the world's history—a night that had no truce. The chiefs slain, vengeance passed to the sons, and even the sons' sons were engrossed in the quiet stealthy slaughter of that night. Led by Aswat-thaman, warriors crept from tent to tent in the darkness dealing murder unopposed. Dhrishtadyumna, Sikhandrin and other princes met their doom. Duryodhan heard the news of slaughter, and spent his last breath in blessing Drona's son. So he died a happy death, according to his nature, and the war, for ever terrible in the annals of Northern India, ended.

Dhrita-rashtra—the ancient king—ordered his royal car, and visited the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Queen Gandhari, Pritha and the widows of the Kurus accompanied him, and there was great mourning in the land.

Yudhishthir, surveying the scene, spoke to Vidura and the other chiefs of the Kurus still remaining :

'All these friends and foemen slain deserve the funeral rites. Let none lie on the field, but all receive the final honour.'

Vidura and his friends hastened to procure sandalwood, scented aloes, oils and perfumes. They brought silks of lustre and fabrics beautifully woven. Others carried dry wood, and placed the shattered

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cars and broken lances ready for the pyre. The slain were arranged according to rank; and after the pyres had been anointed with oil, the fires were lit, and thus the funeral rite was performed amid the wailing of the bereaved. The thousand pyres burned a clear red, for men of all the nations fell in Kurukshetra.

When all the dead were burned to ashes, Dhritarashtra and Yudhishthir slowly held their way to the Ganges; and so many were the mourners that their footsteps made a pathway to the place of sacred ablutions.

Joy came to one only of all who were concerned in this terrible conflict, and even she was an orphan and a widow. Abhimanyu's wife, princess of Matsya, gave birth to a son, who was called Prakshit. He was Arjun's grandson, and inherited the prowess of his race.

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XIX

PEACE

Vyasa—Dhrita-rashtra—Pritha—Arjun—Princess of Matsya—Prakshit

By the side of the sacred river Pritha mourned for Karna, and for the first time the sons of Pandu were made aware who Karna was.

'The matchless archer, my sons,' said their mother, 'whom all believed to be the son of a charioteer, who faced the stoutest warrior, and who by his death hath earned the greater fame, was Karna, my eldest son. Karna was your elder brother, and he was born of the Sun!'

The Pandavs wept in anguish for their brother, and offered oblations to his spirit with their whole hearts.

The old king, Dhrita-rashtra, made his peace with all the Pandavs save Bhima, and him he intended to crush to death while seeming to embrace him, for though sightless, he still had enormous strength.

Krishna, however, saw the old man's intention, and in place of Bhima caused an iron image of Bhima to be substituted. Dhrita-rashtra exerted all his force upon the supposed son of Pandu,

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who had been so active in slaying the Kuru princes. He crushed the image, and considerably hurt himself in doing so.

Afterwards he wept sorrowfully, and confessed his intention, when Krishna stepped forward and introduced the real person. The hatred in the old man's breast had all died away, and he embraced Bhima with the love he had always previously felt for him.

Yudhishthir was crowned king at Hastina, but he always respected the position of Dhrita-rashtra and Gandhari, and gave them an honoured place in the coronation procession.

To free himself from all taint of the war, Yudhishthir decided to perform the horse sacrifice. A horse was accordingly set free to wander at will, and Arjun, as the king's guard, followed it. Wherever the horse wandered unmolested, the sovereign of the land thereby acknowledged Yudhishthir as overlord. Should any attempt to stay the horse, the king's guard was bound to wage war upon him. This Arjun did, and at length the steed returned, its approach heralded by minstrels.

Yudhishthir told Bhima to arrange for the sacrifice, as the auspicious day and hour were at hand. Altars were built, a level sward was measured, and soon halls and mansions were erected. Messengers went forth to invite distant sovereigns to Hastina. The monarchs came with gifts to honour the king, whose mind was now at rest.

Arjun arrived with the steed, and the first ceremonies were performed. Then the priests slew the

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horse, and, following the rules of the Veda, Queen Draupadi was placed beside it. Afterwards the sacrifice was made, and the princes inhaled the smoke that cleansed them from sin. Finally, Vyasa, Dhrita-rashtra's sire, raised the holy song and blessed Yudhishthir and all his subjects.

'Thine is the ancient Kuru empire, destined thine from thy birth. Rule it, and the nations of the world, as their father and king!'

For fifteen years Yudhishthir ruled Hastina, and at the close Krishna's life ended. The Pandav brothers then appointed the young Prince Prakshit to the throne. He was the son of the princess of Matsya, the widow of Abhimanyu, and was born after the war. The Pandavs gave up the palace for the forest and a life of contemplation, and in heaven's good time were absorbed into the Holy One Himself.

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GLOSSARY

a usually pronounced as in **wall.**
ai as in **aisle.**
au as **ou** in **house.**
e as **a** in **rare.**
i as in **lily** and in **police.**
u as in **bull** and in **rude.**
s is often modified in pronunciation into **sh.**
th is pronounced as **t.**

ablutions (22. 23), holy washings.

aboriginal (68. 5). The people who lived in a region at the first. In this case the remains of the early tribes (p. x) are meant. Some authorities think the lowest caste were aboriginals.

Agastya (27. 23), one of the most famous saints or rishis who had gained supernatural powers.

ailing lamb (124. 19). Many kinds of animals show no pity towards the sick of their kind.

alienate (85. 12), estrange, banish.

application (92. 20), hard work, concentration ; one of the elements of duty.

banyan (57. 22), an Indian tree of the fig genus. Its branches send down shoots which take root and enlarge into trunks. Thus one banyan tree may cover a very great area.

bosses (67. 6), the raised ornaments on the bow.

Brahma. The Vedas or ancient sacred writings of India teach the belief in one supreme God, named Brahma. Brahma has three powers, each of which is personified and worshipped : creation, preservation and the final destruction

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of the world. The creator is Brahma, the preserver is Vishnu, while the destroyer is Siva, who, however, restores the world until the appointed last day. Brahma is not so prominent a god as Vishnu and Siva at the present time.

Brahmans. The highest of the castes. The myth concerning caste is as follows. Brahma decided to people the earth direct from his own body. His eldest born came from his head and was placed in charge of the Vedas. His name was Brahma, and his descendants were the priests and preceptors. The second born sprang from the creator's right arm, and became the warrior or Kshatra (or Shatriya). From his left arm the warrior's wife came forth. In the same way, from his thighs arose the male and female agriculturists and traders, this caste being known as Vaisyas. The fourth caste took origin from the feet of Brahma, and became mechanics and labourers. The Sudras, as they are called, are the lowest caste, bound to serve the others, especially the Brahmans. The first three castes were allowed to receive instruction from the Vedas, but the Sudras might not. The Brahmans possess the privilege of teaching the scriptures, and in earlier times, as is supposed to have been the case with the Druids of ancient Britain, were the only cultured class. Thus although the Kshatras, who are the same as the Rajputs, were nominally the rulers, the Brahmans held the real power, being the divinely ordained counsellors of the kings and judges.

caste (xi ; 16. 17, etc.), a division of Indian society. There were four castes. See *Brahmans*.

chariots and cars (112. 20, etc.). The chariot is frequently mentioned in these stories, and supernatural properties are often associated with it. The car of Yudhishthir faithfully reflected the state of his soul, and sank to earth when the prince descended so low as to equivocate concerning Aswatthaman, the elephant (p. 122).

Probably the descriptions of ceremonial cars are not very greatly exaggerated. The Duke of Wellington's funeral car, now in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral, will assist the imagination in picturing the grandeur that would be realised in a land where magnificence was so much sought after

chowri (14. 8), the yak, an animal from the Himalaya regions. Its tail was used as a fan on ceremonial occasions.

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circle (112. 2). In this instance due to the effect of the rapidly whirling metallic maces. Sometimes 'circle' means the fully drawn bow, and in the appropriate place could signify the discus of Krishna.

coins (14. 4). This shows that the use of money was to some extent understood. The India of the *Maha-bharata* was a cultured and civilized India.

comet (79. 22), a celestial body which appears to cross the paths of the stars : comets often resemble stars with the addition of long tails of light which 'fire the sky.'

conjunction (6. 25), a certain position of heavenly bodies with respect to the sun : as a rule, planets in conjunction appear equally bright. The effect mentioned can often be seen.

constellation (10. 20), a group of bright stars conspicuous above the rest.

contemplation (22. 15). Quiet thought was an act of worship.

Dharma (4. 25). Righteousness and duty ; considered as a god.

dialogues (xii). Besides the conversation of Krishna and Arjun, Sanjaya and Dhrita-rashtra also speak ; hence the plural applies.

discus (21. 11). Lat. from Gk. *diskos* (disc, dish). A round, flat piece of iron, copper or stone, used in games and, as in the text, for a weapon. The modern discus is the large iron quoit.

doubly-armed (105. 4). 'Right is Might.' The sentiment is that of Shakespeare's line :

'Thrice armed is he that hath his quarrel just.'

emblazoned (5. 26), adorned with heraldic figures—coats of arms, etc.

Everest (27. 16). The highest peak of the Himalayas. There are many instances of comparisons with mountains, particularly when it is required to emphasise personal beauty.

falchion (12. 8). The word is used poetically to signify any sword : properly, a falchion is a short, broad sword with a slightly curved point and convex edge.

feud (121. 17). The tribal warfare is mentioned in the Introduction. In the story Drupad, king of Panchala, is mentioned as having insulted Drona.

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Gandhara (43. 22), western frontier province, roughly in the neighbourhood of Peshawar.

gold-decked (34. 15), adorned with golden ornaments.

heir-apparent (17. 11). Yudhishthir would be king if living at the time of Dhrita-rashtra's death. Strictly speaking, a living man has no heir, but the future heir should be called the heir-apparent.

Holy Song (Chapter XIII. See also Introduction, page xi), the *Bhagavat Gita*.

The following parallel passages are of interest :

Bhagavat Gita. I am the way, supporter, lord, witness, abode, refuge, friend.

New Testament. I am the way, the truth and the life. (John 16. 6).

B.G. I never depart from him (the true adept) ; he never departs from me.
N.T. He dwelleth in Me and I in Him. (John 6. 56.)

B.G. They who worship me with the true devotion are in me and I in them.
N.T. I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one. (John 17. 23.)

B.G. Be assured that he who worships me perishes not.
N.T. Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3. 16.)

B.G. I will deliver thee from all sin : do not grieve.
N.T. Son, be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee. (Matt. 9. 2.)

B.G. Sacrifice, almsgiving or austerity done without faith is evil.
N.T. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. (Romans 14. 23.)

Parallel to page 92. 26–29, 'The man . . . perfection' is the passage from 1 Cor. 10. 31 : Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

inauspicious (90. 13), unlucky, not favourable. The *auspicious* moment for an event was calculated by the astrologers according to the movements of the stars.

Indra. The god of thunder, rain and battle. His heaven is called Swarga (54. 31), the abode of the virtuous who there await their next incarnation.

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jackal (15. 8), an animal resembling a fox. Meanness is associated with the jackal, owing to the notion that it acts as a provider for the lion which protects it.

Kailasa (22. 7) or Gangri, a peak of the Himalayas in West Thibet, looked upon as sacred by the Hindus. It is the source of the Indus and Brahmaputra.

Kandarpa (25. 11) corresponds to Cupid, the god of love.

Kuvera (53. 18), god of wealth.

lapis lazuli (6. 5), rich blue-coloured mineral ; the source of ultramarine.

lotus (19. 21). A name for the water-lily of the Ganges and of the Nile, but also vaguely applied to many plants in mythology. As a term of comparison it signifies great beauty. As a food the lotus of tradition robbed its eaters of memory, determination and activity.

mantra (14. 7), chant, incantation.

Meru (6. 12). The home of Indra, north of the Himalayas, in the centre of the earth ; the north-pole of the globe ; the highest mountain in the world. All these are fabulous explanations.

Patala (3. 15), underworld.

previous existence (18. 23). It was believed that after death the soul assumed another body. The righteous people thus became holier until they were absorbed into the deity ; the wicked were degraded and it was possible, under this belief, for the soul of a human being to have entered the body of a beast. Transmigration of souls.

rishi (18. 16), holy man, saint, anchorite.

sandal-drops (13. 1), an essence extracted from the fragrant wood of an Asiatic tree.

scimitar (68. 6). See *falchion*.

single (84. 23), honest.

Siva (18. 31). See *Brahma*

stadium (7. 9). the ground or arena of an amphitheatre.

Swarga (54. 31). See *Indra*.

svasti (50. 17). The swastika is now well known as a charm, and is expressed by the following symbol

swayamvara (19. 18), the bride's own choice of a husband, only permitted to princesses.

Vishnu. See *Brahma* and the Introduction.

Yama The god of Death.

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QUESTIONS AND SUBJECTS FOR ESSAYS AND RESEARCH

1. Give your experiences as Bhima in Patala.

2. In reading the story make a list of the various gods and the natural objects, etc., associated with them.

3. Describe the armour and arms of the ancient Indian warrior. If you are near a good museum, visit the ethnological section and make sketches of ancient shields, helmets, maces.

4. Give a brief description of the coronation ceremony of the Kurus.

5. What impression do you obtain of the mode of life, and character of the Brahmans? (See especially Chap. III.)

6. At the time of the events mentioned in this book, Indian architecture was considerably advanced. Give instances from the text to prove this statement.

7. Describe the swayamvara or bridal of Draupadi, as seen by one of Arjun's younger brothers.

8. What does the word 'avatar' mean?

9. On a map of India locate the district between Hastinapura and Delhi as the centre, and mark roughly the regions named in the story. Thus trace how great was the influence of the Bharats, and (Chap. XIV.) whence the allies came to the battle of Kuruk-shetra.

10. Collect a few examples of graceful or tactful speeches from the text. (See p. 37. 6-7, for an example.)

11. A person of Duryodhan's character is known as 'calculating.' Write a brief account of Duryodhan from this point of view.

12. Yudhishthir, besides being virtuous, was 'a sportsman.' Give instances. Name 'sportsmen' from other stories, as well as other 'sportsmen' in *The Pandav Princes*: write a few words in each case to support your choice.

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13. Study carefully Draupadi, who is considered one of the most spirited queens of literature and history.

14. Modern warfare has scarcely any implement which was not imagined by the ancient oriental poets, as far as effects are concerned. Find parallels between the poetical exaggerations in the text and the actual effects of modern weapons.

15. Study the 'riddles' on p. 69. Compose a few on, say, a cloud, a daisy, a scrupulous man, and on three subjects of your own choice.

16. Trace the stages of Uttara's progress from boasting to bravery.

17. Give instances from the text to show the state of civilisation in Northern India thirteen centuries before Christ. Special references must be made to the following points :

city life,	weapons,
trade,	use of money,
use of metals,	animals used in men's service,
artistic metal work,	obedience to the law,
personal ornaments,	medicine,
painting,	sculpture or graving,
food,	needlework.

18. In the early days of the European War (1914-1915), Krishna's speech (Chap. XIII.) was quoted in part to show the spirit in which warfare should be waged Select the portions from the text which you think applicable.

19. What are the duties of the warrior? (p. 92)

20. Describe the last fight of Abhimanyu.

21. Write the quarrel scene between Yudhishthir and Arjun in presence of Krishna in your own words, in the form of a dialogue.

22. Relate instances of curses taking effect, like the curse on Karna (p. 128. 29).

23. Subjects suggested for short compositions in verse :

(*a*) A voice at the Tank (p. 57).

(*b*) A day of battle (p. 101).

(*c*) The death of Bhishma (p. 108).

(*d*) The foreboding of Arjun (p. 115).

(*e*) Subhadra's lament (p. 116).

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HELPS TO FURTHER STUDY.

1. *Maha-bharata* has several times been translated into English. There is a condensed poetical version, by R. C. Dutt in the 'Temple Classics' (Dent).

2. Essays on the subject and condensed versions occur in Sir Monier Williams' 'Indian Epic Poetry,' 1863; J. T. Wheeler's 'History of India,' 1867; J. C. Oman's 'Struggles of the Dawn, etc.,' 1863, and 'The Great Indian Epics,' 1894. The 'Encyclopædia Britannica' gives a concise summary, as does 'The World's Great Books' (Harmsworth).

The latter work also furnishes a glimpse at the various Vedas.

3. 'Stories of Indian Gods and Heroes,' by W. D. Munro, Harrap, 1912, besides other myths deals with this, and the same publishers issue a larger work, by Dr. Coomaraswamy.

4. 'A Dictionary of Non-Classical Mythology,' by Marian Edwardes and Lewis Spence (Dent), will be useful for reference.

5. The 'Historians' History of the World,' 1908, Volume II., contains much of interest to the student of Ancient Indian topics, having chapters on Indian History—Legend and Reality, Manners and Customs of the Ancient Hindus, Brahmanism, as well as a map of Ancient India.

6. Quite the most readable introduction to the mythology of India is to be found in Bulfinch's 'Age of Fable,' Chap. XXXVII.

7. The 'Holy Song' is included in 'Sakuntala, etc.,' published by Walter Scott, the version being the prose translation of Mr. Charles Wilkins, published at the request of Warren Hastings in 1785.

8. Actual objects which illustrate Indian civilisation should be seen if possible. Horniman's Museum and the British Museum, London, offer special advantages; but most museums have now a good ethnological section.

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